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16 St John Street, London EC1M 4AY
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Editor Martin Jacques

Editorial office Sally Davison

Editorial board
Irene Brennan, Dan Connor, John Foster, Jean Gardiner, Eric Hobsbawm, John Hoffman, Alan Hunt, Arnold Kettle, Betty Matthews, Bert Pearce, David Priscott, Bob Rowthorn, Mike Seifert

Focus Paul Webster

Channel Five Sally Townsend

Reviews John Kelly

Advertising Tom Lonergan

Circulation Dave Grant

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FOCUS

THE CRASH OF 83?

What is your image of bankers — a drab, conservative lot? *The Financial Times* recently reported on an exception to this stereo-type, Bill Patterson, executive of the Penn Square Bank, Oklahoma City. Mr Patterson apparently used to show up at the office in Tyrolean garb, complete with plumed hat and lederhosen. For variety, he would don a Mickey Mouse mask or a Batman mask with ears that wiggled.

Unhappily for Penn Square's depositors — and a lot of other creditors, including some big US banks — Mr Patterson's financial judgement was as eccentric as his sartorial tastes. Loans were made for speculative ventures in the energy sector on very questionable security. In the resulting collapse the US financial community is looking as well over a billion dollars worth of very dubious IOUs and wondering how much will have to be written off.

The fate of an obscure American bank would not have received as much attention if it had not followed a series of other financial disturbances which have all raised the same question. The problem, in a nutshell, is *bad debts*. Banks make their profits by financial mediation — they accept deposits and use them to provide loans. It is usually supposed that the loans will be repaid, except in a few isolated cases. What happens when the cases become more frequent and less isolated?

The last few months have certainly seen a spate of major defaults by debtors. In the US the Penn Square failure follows the bankruptcy of Drysdale Securities which used billions of other people's dollars to speculate on a fall in interest rates. The reduction in rates arrived, but too late to help Drysdale. In Germany the electrical company AEG Telefunken has gone to the wall, unable to pay substantial bank loans. The big US Multinational, International Harvesters, has the same problems on a bigger scale. Turkey has recently experienced huge financial disruptions. In Italy the Ambrosiano group went under in circumstances so dramatic that they would have been rejected by Paul Erdman as a hopelessly implausible basis for one of his novels about financial manipulation — the disappearance and suicide (?) of the bank's managing director, the involvement of the Vatican, the use of Central American holding companies with names like Worldwide Trading Incorporated to channel funds heaven knows where.

Britain has not escaped. The Isle of Man's attempt to imitate the Cayman Islands as an 'off-shore' centre for tax free banking has gone wrong with a spectacular bank failure. More seriously the clearing banks have revealed some substantial 'non-performing' loans to British industry, as well as some ill-considered ventures into the US scene.

But the debtors who really have the banks worried are governments. Eastern European governments have, predictably, received the most attention: Poland's inability to service its debts has been well publicised. Largely as a consequence of the Polish crisis other Comecon countries have been starved of credit — Romania has had to follow Poland in renegotiating its debts, while even Hungary and East Germany, where the underlying financial position is apparently sound, have had to take emergency measures to preserve their access to Western currency.

In quantitative terms, however, the most important debtors are the countries of Latin America. Most of them are having trouble with interest payments and repayments of principal on their loans. Since a lot of the borrowing is at rates of interest which vary with the market rate (like a typical mortgage in Britain) the recent credit squeeze in the US has meant a substantial increase in the burden. Chile, Brazil and Argentina are all in difficulties and in August Mexico, which owes about $60 billion, had to reschedule its debts (that is, demand more time to pay). At the same time Mexico has tried to generate more foreign exchange by big devaluations and drastic reductions in public spending to deflate the economy and cut the imports bill. Even so the central banks of the industrialised countries and the International Monetary Fund have had to step in to avoid a complete dislocation of Mexico's trade and foreign payments.

This climate of default and near-default is encouraging a reassessment of financial institutions. Are we heading for a classical banking crisis, a collapse in the international credit mechanism like the breakdown of the early thirties?

Standard economic theory has had little to say on such questions. Monetarists have concentrated exclusively on the *quantity* of the bank's *liabilities*, that is their deposits which are the most important contemporary form of money. Little or nothing has been said about the *quality* of banking *assets*, that is the loans they make and whether they can be assumed to be worth more than the paper on which they are recorded. But if too many of the bank's lending operations go wrong then its deposits will lose their value and the 'money supply' is in for a sharp and nasty reduction. Traditionally this is just the way in which the quantity of money *has* been controlled —not by Sir Geoffrey Howe's medium term financial strategy but by periodic waves of bank failures and credit defaults. Could it happen again?

One of the few economists to deal with such matters is Hyman P Minsky, a maverick US Keynesian.[1] Minsky points out that financial instability is not a result of avoidable speculation. Instability grows out of stability itself since in good times for banks, where loans are secure, there is every incentive for each bank to expand its activities. An individual bank faces very little risk in doing so when the overall banking structure is robust: it is unlikely to be troubled by a lack of confidence and its debtors are functioning in an easy environment where they can, if need be, refinance their positions.

Inevitably then bank lending expands

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throughout the system, building up debt structures which are increasingly susceptible to shocks, and running down the liquid reserves which seem unnecessary in periods of boom. The limit to expansion comes with major defaults which can trigger a deflationary spiral. Minsky suggests that several potential banking crises have occurred in the US in the last 15 years, which were only avoided by Federal action to stave off a panic.

Nevertheless, Minsky's examples themselves tend to indicate that governments can control the situation within their own countries. It is not easy: credit policies which are too tight can precipitate the smash, while relaxed policies simply encourage a continuation of the debt expansion process. As a result the control operation is long and painful. High interest rates and stagnation persist for many years, with the Central Bank maintaining the pressure but backing off whenever general confidence is threatened — as the US banking authorities backed off last month.

Internationally things are much more obscure — it is not even clear who has the responsibility for stabilising the credit mechanism. Charles Kindleberger, another rather heterodox American Keynesian, has stressed the dangers of this vacuum in two books which portray the collapse of the thirties and make the case for an international regulatory body to provide emergency credit[2]. Much of the difficulty comes from the fact that international lending has been progressively privatised. Twenty years ago it was largely a question of governments borrowing from other governments; today such capital movements are overwhelmingly the business of big private banks operating in the Euro-currency markets.

Nobody can be sure that a crash can be avoided. Once again however, it is likely that official intervention — by the IMF and other agencies — will prevent the present series of debt defaults from escalating into a chain of bank failures on a world scale. At the recent IMF summit conference in Toronto, Western leaders showed that if they were reluctant to help developing countries money could be found to prevent their troubles spreading to the Western banks which have been financing them. The real danger is that the control exercise will prove enormously damaging to the real structure of production. Insecurity will be contained but the full stability required to support growth in world trade and investments will not be provided, for fear of another inflationary wave of unrestricted lending. High interest rates and credit restrictions will continue to impose recession on the developing countries. The real adjustments which are urgently needed in production, trade and investment will thus be postponed.

The social costs of buying financial security in this way can be illustrated from recent events. Ironically, the failure of Penn Square Bank and the problems of the Mexican government have a specific common factor. In both cases much of the speculative borrowing that took place was for the energy sector: Penn Square was exploring natural gas and other sources while Mexico was developing its oil fields. Canada's Dome Corporation, another prominent bad debtor, was also in the energy business. This is surely one of the most pressing problems of the real economy — whatever the fate of individual investors it is clear that we need more experimentation in this sector, not less. The present obsession with financial stability is likely to inhibit socially needed innovations in energy supply.

John Grahl

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[1] Hyman P Minsky, *The Financial Instability Hypothesis*, Thames Papers and Political Economy, 1978.

[2] C P Kindleberger *The World in Depression*, Allen Lane 1973, *Manias Panics and Crashes* Harper Row 1978.

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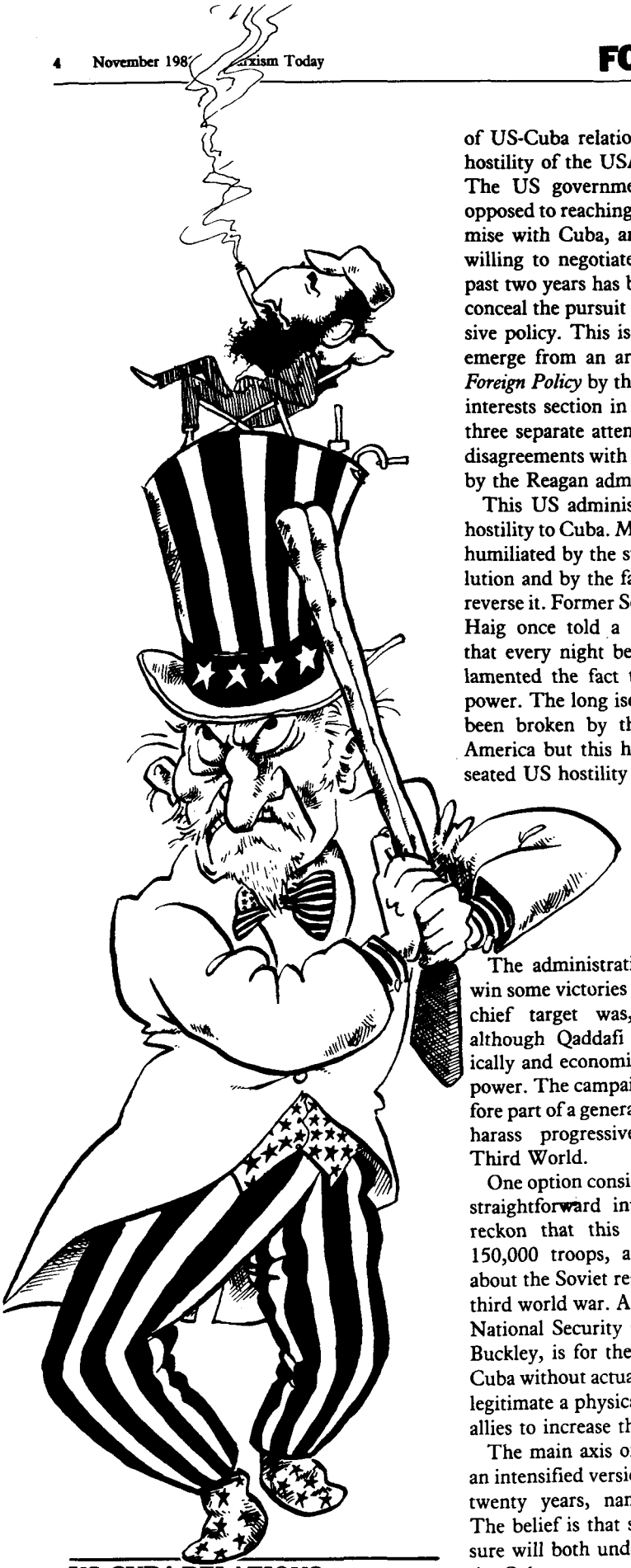

US-CUBA RELATIONS

The 20th anniversary of the Cuban missile crisis is a sober reminder of the parlous state of US-Cuba relations and of the enduring hostility of the USA to Cuban Revolution. The US government remains implacably opposed to reaching any diplomatic compromise with Cuba, and its pretence of being willing to negotiate with Havana over the past two years has been a front, designed to conceal the pursuit of another, more aggressive policy. This is the main conclusion to emerge from an article in the US journal *Foreign Policy* by the former head of the US interests section in Havana. He shows that three separate attempts by Cuba to discuss disagreements with the USA were sabotaged by the Reagan administration.

This US administration has a particular hostility to Cuba. Many of its members were humiliated by the success of the 1959 revolution and by the failure of US attempts to reverse it. Former Secretary of State General Haig once told a Congressional audience that every night before he went to bed he lamented the fact that Castro was still in power. The long isolation of Cuba has now been broken by the upsurges in Central America but this has reactivated the deep-seated US hostility to Havana.

The administration is also concerned to win some victories in the Third World. The chief target was, initially, Libya: but although Qaddafi has been hit diplomatically and economically he has remained in power. The campaign against Cuba is therefore part of a general attempt to roll back and harass progressive governments in the Third World.

One option considered by Washington is a straightforward invasion. But the experts reckon that this would require at least 150,000 troops, and there is uncertainty about the Soviet response: it might lead to a third world war. Another option, floated by National Security Council adviser William Buckley, is for the USA to declare war on Cuba without actually invading. This would legitimate a physical blockade and force US allies to increase their pressure on Cuba.

The main axis of US policy is, however, an intensified version of what it has been for twenty years, namely economic warfare. The belief is that sustained economic pressure will both undermine the popularity of the Cuban government at home and reduce its legitimacy internationally. The flight of tens of thousands of Cubans from the port of Mariel in 1980 has given Washington the idea of promoting a massive movement of defection from Cuba that results above all from continued economic hardship.

This economic pressure comes in two forms. One is the continuation of the US blockade, and the severing of the financial and tourism links that Cuba has recently developed with the outside world. The USA would like its other NATO allies to sever their relations too — something they have, so far, declined to do. The Reagan government has had more success with its Latin American and Caribbean allies, several of whom, such as Jamaica and Colombia, have reduced their links with Havana in the past two years.

The other prong of the attack is propaganda, the sustained attempt to delegitimise the Cuban revolution in the eyes of its own people. The visits by Cuban exiles to Havana have to some extent helped this, by giving these citizens of Miami the chance to tell and show their relatives in Cuba the wonders of the American way of life. Washington is now adding its own voice to this, by setting up a broadcasting service, Radio Marti, that will beam hostile propaganda to Cuba.

Although an invasion is not yet on the cards, other forms of military pressure are also being developed. US and other NATO forces carried out manoeuvres in the Straits of Florida this March, and troops practised landings on simulated Cuban beaches in Puerto Rico. US officials like to stress that most of America's oil imports pass through the Straits of Florida on their way to the ports of the US south. Anti-Castro exiles in Miami have now received increased license to train and recruit — but how serious they are in practice many doubt.

The sharpest military confrontation is, however, in Central America. Reagan sees El Salvador and Nicaragua as the best places to confront Cuba, and despite the stalemate in the situation there, plans for overthrowing the Sandinista government have been laid down. Military harassment by well armed exiles in Honduras is one part of the campaign. The other, and the key one, involves the kind of economic pressure applied to Cuba, exploiting economic vulnerability for political pay-off. The latter strategy is virtually cost free to the US, and in Chile and Jamaica proved a difficult enemy to fight. If Washington is, in the short run, unable to overthrow the Cuban government itself, it does appear determined to isolate the Latin American revolution on its Caribbean fortress by eliminating the beachheads which it has now acquired on the mainland.

Maxine Molyneux

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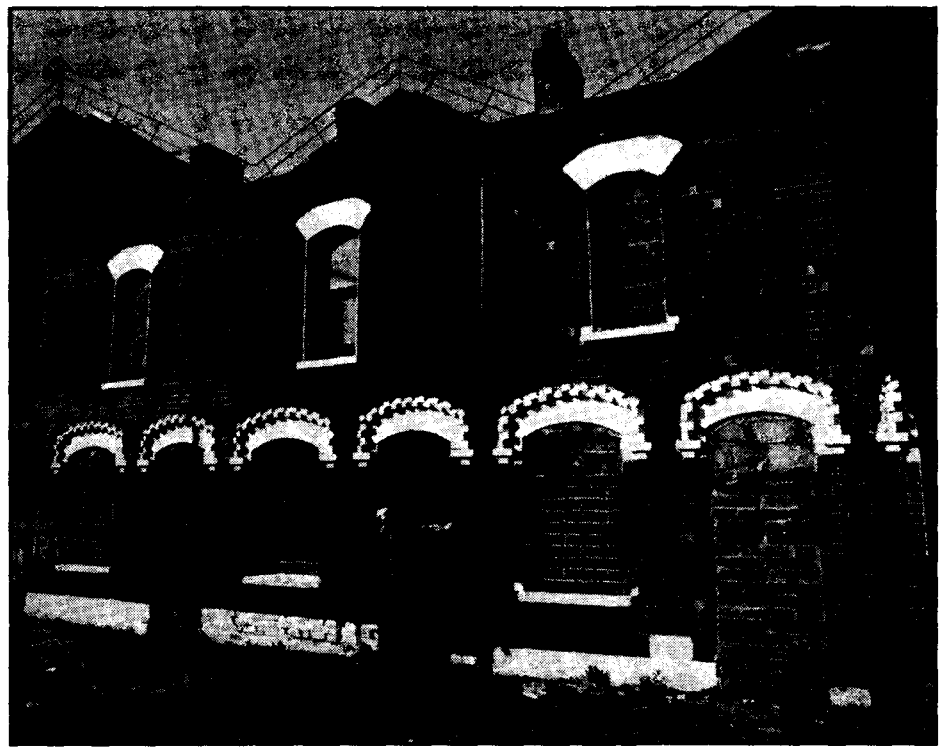
PAYMENT FOR DEBT



In Northern Ireland, as elsewhere, health workers have been demonstrating their opposition to the Government's efforts to hold down this year's pay settlement. As has been pointed out, a 4% increase (the original offer) for a worker earning £44 a week is less than 70p after deductions — scarcely sufficient to buy three extra pints of milk.

Given the now recognised fact that Northern Ireland is one of the most expensive regions of Great Britain to live in, these amounts are clearly inadequate. But as public employees, many are having their wages cut even further by deductions made under the Payment for Debt (NI) Act. Amounts can be deducted for rent, rates, electricity and gas arrears. Initially introduced in October 1971 in an attempt to defeat the civil rights inspired rent and rates strike, the Act was later 'normalised' and extended to non-political debtors. As it was passed under the Emergency Provision legislation it is still periodically subject to approval by Parliament.

The effect of direct deductions from the benefits of claimants to whom the Act originally also applied, and from the wages of public employees, was to force many families below the official poverty line. Little wonder, then, that one in every three children in the province is being brought up in a family struggling to survive at this level. The appalling poverty, bad housing and high unemployment rates in Northern Ireland were recently highlighted in the Social Security Advisory Report, which acknowledged somewhat despairingly that 'a combination of social and economic factors makes Northern Ireland by far the poorest part of the United Kingdom'.

In the case of supplementary benefit claimants, since 1980 deductions for debt have been brought into line with the English practice. Under what is known as the Rent and Fuel Direct Scheme, a standard amount (currently £1.20, but soon to be increased) is taken towards the payment of arrears, as well as an amount to cover current consumption of rent and fuel. Experience, however, has shown that this can still leave many claimants with total incomes of approximately £10-15 per week to cover the living costs of a single parent and dependent child — this being largely due to the particularly high fuel costs in the province.

Public employees have not been affected by these changes and are still exposed to the full rigour of the Payment for Debt Act. Deductions made under this Act continue to have a shattering effect on the incomes of low paid workers. As low pay is a massive problem, it is not surprising to find that statistics suggest that over half the families on the poverty line in the province have at least one parent in full-time work. In many cases deductions from wages taken under the Payment for Debt Act mean that such families might be marginally better off if they stopped work and claimed benefit.

Examples of the PDA in operation include the following:

a Ms A — a separated wife with five children (ages 9-16, one a special care case). Employed as a domestic in an old people's home at a basic wage of £54.45 per week, she is also in receipt of family income supplement (£15.90) and family allowance (£23.75). £19 a week was deducted for electricity arrears, on top of deductions for tax, national insurance etc, out of her wages. She has no current electricity supply, and lights her home with candles.

b Ms B — an ancillary worker in the Royal Victoria Hospital earning £70 per week. Out of this, £20 per week was taken for rent arrears, £20 a week for electricity arrears and £20 for tax, national insurance etc leaving her with a wage packet of £10.

c Mr X — a postman in Londonderry with a wife and four dependent children. A PDA order was taken out against him for rent arrears, providing for the deduction of any money that he might earn over £55 per week. Hence, his standard of living, irrespective of the amount of overtime he worked, was actually set for him.

In the vast majority of cases, the first that such people know of the Payment for Debt Act is when they receive a reduced wage packet. Officially the amount prescribed for deduction to cover arrears is £9 a week per debt although this ruling is not always adhered to. The Payment for Debt legislation also allows for lump sums to be directly deducted from any compensation payments, court awards etc, due to be paid to debtors.

Given the trade union movements' current concern about the low incomes of the great majority of public employees, it would be beneficial to many such workers in Northern Ireland if a campaign could also be launched for the repeal of the Payment for Debt Act. This Act is both discriminatory and vicious in its singling out of workers in Northern Ireland. The Act is also dangerous in the wider context of the United Kingdom — it sets a precedent of legislation introduced to deal with a specific emergency political situation being extended and 'normalised' into an oppressive arm of social policy. The PDA has survived both Labour and Conservative administrations. Some ten years after the original rent and rates strike (mounted against internment without trial) it is still in use against low paid public employees who inevitably fall into debt due to their inadequate wages and the high cost of living in Northern Ireland. Forced below the poverty line, these workers and their families are caught in a vicious circle of deprivation and virtual despair.

Avila Kilmurray

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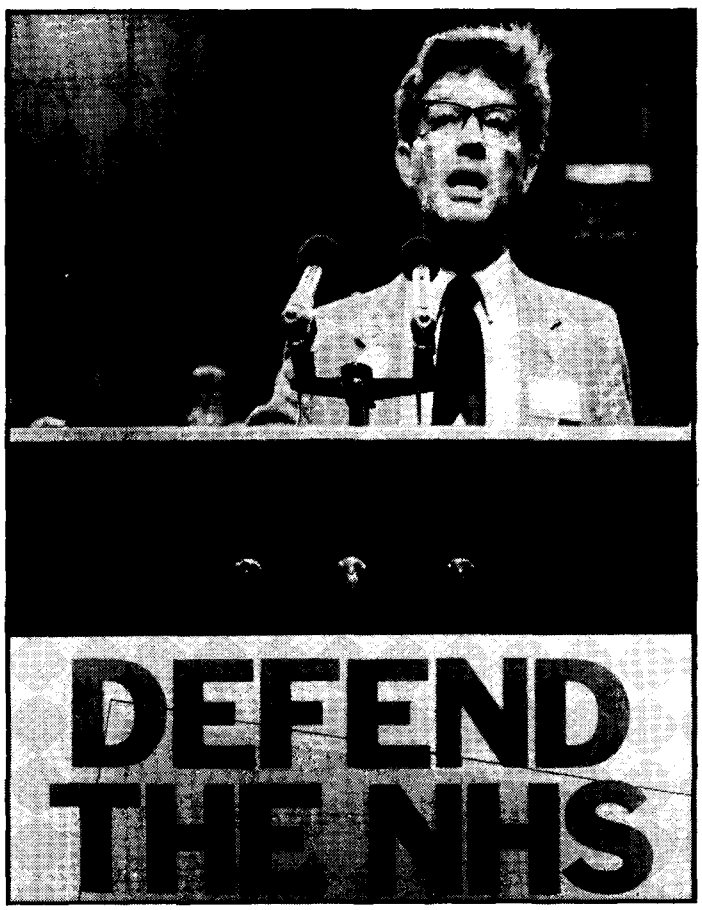
Going Public

An interview with Rodney Bickerstaffe



A number of people have said that there need never have been a dispute in the NHS at all and that a settlement of some kind or another was possible, either agreed or imposed by the Government. If this Government had only been more subtle or flexible in its own response, the dispute would never have come about.

Certainly the Government has not been either subtle or flexible and that has been deliberate. It is not normally difficult for settlements to be reached and if a higher percentage had been on offer earlier then there might never have been a dispute. But that is exactly what was said about the winter of discontent in 1979. A lot of union people were saying after the event that if only the Government had moved from the 5% in August or September of 1978, the whole damn winter would not have gone the way it did and we would still have had a Labour government.

Is it just a matter of hindsight and a more flexible approach to pay negotiations by the Government?

No, this dispute has been coming for some time. It was just a question of when the whole issue of the National Health Service would come to the fore. In 1973 it was the ancillary staff, in 1974 it was the nursing staff, and in both years there was the issue of private practice. All of this demonstrates the development of trade union consciousness in the National Health Service. It had to come to a major struggle at some point, and it had to be under this Government. We knew that this Government would try to chew up the Health Service, because they don't believe in its principles. Breaking the health service workers is intended as a prologue to breaking up the National Health Service itself. We have seen that with these deliberate leaks of the 'think tank' proposals and the Treasury support for them. The fact that Margaret Thatcher has now quietly dropped them does not mean that they will not be picked up again. They will be resurrected in some form, perhaps piecemeal. It's like the Tebbit Bill and the Industrial Relations legislation. The Tories have learned from what happened to the 1971 Act. They are taking this piecemeal approach, step by step, each little item being presented as tolerably reasonable. If they tried the whole shooting match at once, everybody would see it for the horror that it is. I think it is now probably the same with the Health Service.

They thought that they could take on the health service workers with this 4% pay factor. I mean, what the hell is a pay factor? People keep ignoring the fact that it is a *pay policy*, an *incomes policy* for public service workers. The Government thought they had come to the end of the pay round and had a soft group in the health service workers and that they could bash them. They thought that if there was any trouble an extra half per cent or so would overcome it. They did not reckon that National Health Service workers and unions would stick together.

Is this a political dispute as well? Is the National Health Service the dispute that some people are now saying it is, representing a rallying point for the working class, for Labour supporters and for the trade union movement to take a political stand against this Government?

It is and it isn't. When I say it is, it is not because of any conspiracy. Over the last three or four months the Government have been saying that this dispute is being made political by people in smoke-filled rooms using the low-paid health service workers, who have got a fairly reasonable case. They say that the health service dispute is being turned into a political dispute. That's wrong, it is a political dispute because of the philosophy of this Government. It was a political decision to have a 4% pay factor, it was a political decision to increase or break through that pay factor for a number of groups, not least for judges, senior civil servants and the police. These are not simply economic decisions, they are political decisions taken for political reasons. It has been a political decision for the Government to play the dispute the way it has. Ineptly, I admit, but it is still the political stance of this Government that has put us in this position and it will be a political decision that ends it.

What then are the political implications of this dispute? Could it, for example, bring down the Government?

It is all too easy to exaggerate. There are those in the movement who see every squabble as the political battle that is going to bring down this or any government. Every fresh dispute, however small, is said by some to be the political battle, the one that is going to bring the people together. Even so, I have been saying for months that there is so much gloom and doom around in the trade union and labour movement that the one shining light in all the darkness is the National Health Service dispute. Why? Because it is crystal clear that it is a fair and just cause. Nobody in the movement who considers himself or herself of the movement denies the fact that there is massive injustice to these low-paid, dedicated health service workers and that they have been exploited over the years. Slowly but

Interview conducted by Bob Friar

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surely, people are beginning to understand that every three or four years there is a major dispute of low-paid workers in the public services and it is not because they are money-grabbing. They do not have enough money to live on. And that's why people have rallied in support.

But there is another reason. We have got 3.3 million registered unemployed and a further million not registered and we have been unable to stop that. The trade union movement has lost a million and a half members because of unemployment. People want a cause. The health service workers have become that cause and that is why we have had so much support from other trade unionists, even though they have been in desperate situations themselves. They have gone out, they have threatened their own jobs, their factories and their own futures because they feel that this is a time when they have got to make a stand. They have done that over the summer months, but we are now coming to a crucial period. We are coming towards winter. I said at the TUC Congress that the movement would have to take up our case and if the Government did not move, then we would have to come out again, and if the Government still did not move then we would have to come out yet again. That had to be said, and I still think that has to be said, because although the Health Service workers themselves are nine-tenths of this struggle, the movement is the other important tenth.

> If you stand together, even if you do not win, you can do far better than if you stand on your own

Aren't the politics of this dispute extremely fragile? All that you have said could come to nought if there is an offer which divides the unions, or separates nurses from ancillary workers. Would there not also be problems if a formula is found whereby, in the future, health service workers' pay is taken out of the arena of industrial conflict?

On your latter point, the politics of pay might be but the politics of the Health Service itself could not. There are groups of workers in the public service that are tied to pay comparison systems, but that does not mean the services they provide are somehow made apolitical. In the very short term pay could be taken out of the political arena.

Isn't preserving the link between wage struggles and wider issues quite an important one for NUPE? If health service workers were taken out of the pay arena, would that not pose problems for some of the campaigns which you have found it so difficult to organise for?

Well, first of all I don't think we will be taken out of the pay arena. Just because a formula is reached, it does not mean that the role of the trade unions in wage bargaining has somehow gone forever. The civil service unions have demonstrated that. There are no solutions for all time on the pay front, it is more likely that there is some short term deal that lasts two or three years. Even in the area of minimum wage policy, which my own union believes in, it doesn't necessarily mean every year we are not going to have a pitched battle.

It is only now, since the TUC Congress before last, that public service unions have recognised the need to approach the pay policy of this Tory government on a coordinated and planned basis. We have never ever had it before. We have seen the first benefits of that in the health service area. We hope we can mushroom that out to all public services and the public sector as a whole. It might be a dream.

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People laugh at me when I talk about 'united we stand, divided we fall'. It is a question of re-learning organisation. We cannot win unless we stand together, unless we think together, plan together and act together. We are winning people to us. Not just other unions, not just the TUC, but the public. It is getting into the public's psyche. Politicians like Michael Foot and even Denis Healey are now saying there is a major low pay crisis.

You are not going to mistake rhetoric for politics are you?

No, but until the rhetoric starts you cannot put people on the spot. Unless you can get people to come out and say the words, you cannot get them to hold on to those words. We have said it's all right passing resolutions, but what are you going to do about it? When the General Council sends out its circular we have copied the circular to everybody. We have given it a high profile and good publicity. Too often we have not done that in the past. We have passed resolutions at Labour Party Conferences and at the Trades Union Congress and leaders of the movement have said things on television, but we have not followed them up and built on them.

What is it that has forged the unity this time between ancillary workers and nurses, different health service unions and across the TUC as a whole?

Let's start off with the easiest thing. In the preceding ancillary staff wage negotiations it was decided that there would be a fifteen month deal which moved the ancillary workers away from their traditional December settlement to 1 April. We wondered at the time why the Government allowed it or almost even encouraged it. Maybe the Government were so short sighted that they gave the ancillary workers a fifteen months' delay to get them off the hook. They may have been clearing the deck for the civil service dispute. But even that is hardly statesmanship of the highest order, if they could not see one year ahead. What they were setting up then was a possibility of an alliance between a million workers in the National Health Service which had never been seen before. Over the years, health service workers have always been divided. In the past they made sure that the nurses always settled one month, the ancillaries another and the administrative and clerical staff another and the technical staff another.

We have not seen the end of that story yet. There might still be a settlement that will be divisive. Surely, the closeness of the settlement dates alone will not keep the health service workers together.

Certainly this Government has tried to divide the health service workers. We have managed to overcome that in one way or another up to now. The Government's response has been seen by the unions to be divisive and we have talked about it being divisive. Every time that Norman Fowler and the Government have moved to divide us we have cried division, division, division! In saying that we have been saying to our people and to the world we will *not* be divided and that we intend to stand united.

One marked difference between this dispute and the winter of discontent appears to be the greater unity between unions. In the past the unions have almost seemed to enjoy the struggle amongst themselves as much as against the government. What were the reasons for the divisions in the past between the unions? Why have some of those divisions apparently been settled, in the context of this dispute?

Recruitment struggles were a major reason for the disputes. Organisation was about membership and our own union originally was all about membership. Until we get the members in the union there is no machine, no battering ram with which to challenge the system. The membership struggle has politicised the unions as well, of course. In arguing for membership you have to say that you are offering something different, something that other unions are not offering. Well, NUPE is offering a political programme and militancy.

Are those fights for membership not more acute now than they ever have been? Public service employment has taken a battering, but manufacturing industry and private services have suffered even more. Doesn't that mean that the general unions will be looking more than ever to the public services for membership?

The struggle is so desperate that the unions are realising that they cannot continue their old traditional battles for membership in an economy that is rapidly going down the drain, encouraged by this Government. They cannot afford the luxury of not getting together and co-operating, because even the diminished membership base that they have is at risk if they stand on their own rather than standing together.

How united are the health service unions in the present battle? After all, it is only three or four years since the public fights between unions over the strategy to be pursued in the winter of discontent?

It is not entirely a thing of the past. We are not talking about absolute unanimity on everything all the time. During this dispute there have been very real differences between unions, and certainly between union leaderships. 'United we stand divided we fall' is a very hard battle. Every time we come out of the TUC Health Services Committee it is after very real differences have been put on the table. You

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must not get the idea that trade union animosities are suddenly over and done with or somehow that all unions have the same political outlook as NUPE. That would not be true and it would be doing a disservice to us all. But we have also got to overcome our differences over a longer period than a seven month dispute. Not that it will be easy to get away from these political differences. We are not going to get away from differing emphases on militancy as against short term accommodation. My members would not be on the disgustingly low pay they are now if there had not been some accommodation in the past. There is a unity now of sorts and it's the kind of unity where you decide that when the bullets are flying you're more likely to get out alive if you band together. All I am saying is that there is no new-found absolute unity.

It is just because there are more bullets flying now that there is more unity?

I think that is certainly part of it. The pressures are so heavy at the moment that people are realising perforce that they must stand together for the short term. The hope of my union is that we will all get something out of that in both the short and longer term.

Is there more to the present dispute than the obvious benefits of organisation?

There is an important organisational element in it, or all my talk about the TUC and the role of the TUC would be worthless, but there is something beyond organisation. There is a gut reaction of low paid people, that they have had enough. We have had people who have been out on picket lines for six months; hospital domestics in their 50s who are just saying, I and my people and my family have had a lifetime of hardship, we have had a lifetime of being kicked in the teeth and having nothing and we are not prepared to stand it any longer. That has sparked off something, within the Health Service and wider union movement. Suddenly you have seen nurses, hospital catering staff, cleaners and ambulancemen in their uniforms standing on picket lines and saying to this Government 'no, we are not bloody having it'. The trade union movement is now proud of the health service workers and the stand that they are taking. If that group of workers with all their problems can stand up to this Government, then in return other trade unionists have got to do something for them. One journalist said that everybody wants to 'touch the hems' of this dispute. There is such a strength in this cause of low paid people dealing with the sick, with the disabled and with the dying.

Would there have been that support from other workers if the nurses had not been there with the prevailing image of the 'devoted, pretty nurse' looking after the sick?

I don't deny that that has been an important factor. We ensured that people did know that nurses were involved in this dispute. But I hope that we have not done it at the price of the dignity of the non nursing staff in hospitals. After we spoke to the miners, you did not hear Arther Scargill talking about nurses, he talks about the nurses and other health workers. If anybody steps out of line and just mentions the nurses, NUPE rushes in and says it is not just the nurses, it is the health workers.

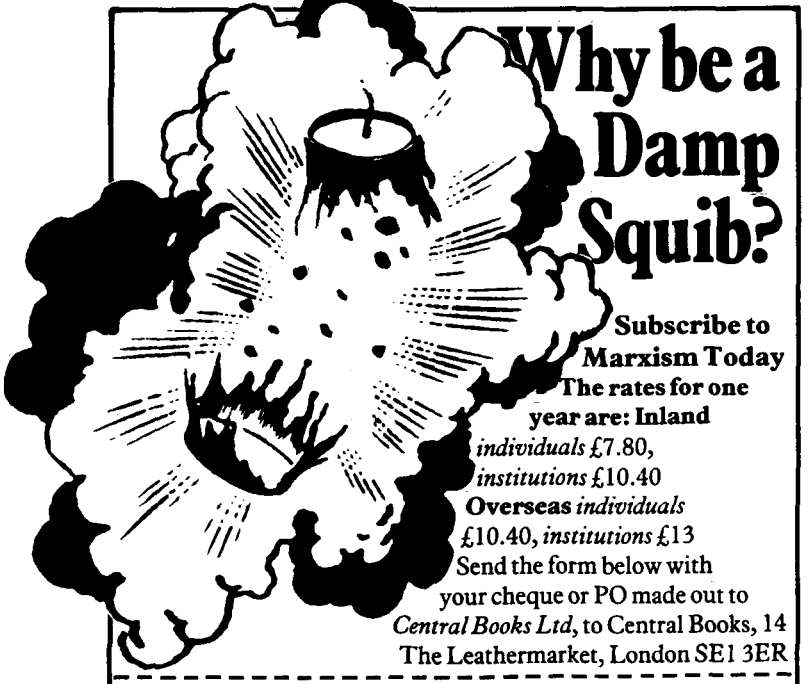
Hasn't your own publicity and your own attempts to mobilise support emphasised the nurses?

They are 450,000 out of the million workers. It would be obtuse to suggest that we should not include nursing staff, but we are also ensuring that everybody knows about the other workers. It is so easy with the nurses. They are a large clump of 450,000. They are people who dress up in uniforms and smile at you and look after you, whereas the other areas are split up a great deal. There are a quarter of a million ancillary workers, but what are ancillary workers? You cannot identify them as a clump like the nurses, because there are hospital barbers, hospital porters, hospital domestics, hospital catering staff, hospital laundry staff, hospital gardeners, hospital postal staff, the list is endless. The image of a nurse in uniform is striking, it does not matter whether she is a student nurse, a pupil nurse or a senior nursing officer, she is a nurse and you cannot do that so easily with ancillary staff and still less so with professional and technical staff and other groups. In terms of sheer identification, in the view of the public the health service is about hospitals, ambulances, nurses and doctors.

To what extent does that represent one of the potential dangers of the dispute? Do the images the union uses not serve to reinforce occupational and sexual stereotypes?

It is certainly a potential danger and we have to work very, very hard to ensure the image of the nurse, the young nurse or the glamorous nurse, does not overcome everything. We are at pains to go out, as I have said before, to other unions in our literature and in our media work to say that there are hundreds and thousands of other people in the Health Service; low paid people doing jobs that you and I would not be prepared to do. There is the danger that if we hadn't done that it would have become solely a nurses' dispute.

Isn't there another problem with the nurses? What if there is a settlement



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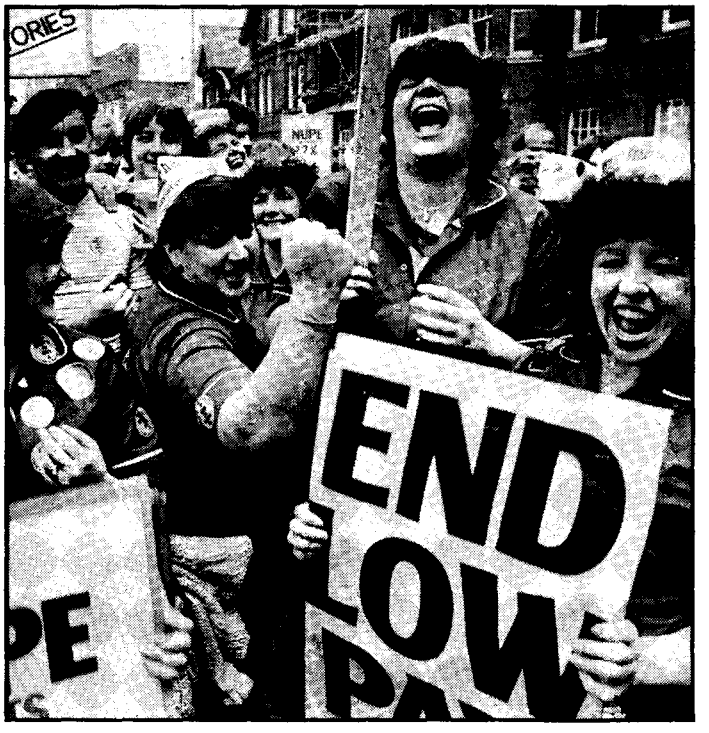

for nurses? What if the nurses, in some way or another, are prised away?

Not all nurses in the Health Service are so lightly to be dealt with. They are not quislings and they are not sell-out merchants. When the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) was talking with the Government on its own, very many of the RCN members contacted the RCN headquarters and said, look we are not just people with professional integrity, we are people with personal integrity and that includes not being given an extra copper or two in order to see the ancillary workers or the administrative, clerical and technical workers just pushed into outer darkness.

The Royal College of Nursing is the largest organisation in the Health Service outside the TUC. What about relations between the TUC affiliates and the Royal College?

There is a gut reaction of low paid people that they have had enough

Well my own union particularly wanted to involve the RCN. When we heard that they were going in to see the Secretary of State, we wanted to have them doing it along with us, rather than them seeing the Government on their own and us seeing the Government on our own. This is not because we see that they are a wonderful organisation, or that we need to latch onto their coat tails. It is because of this theme of unity and it is an obvious area for division, it is as simple as that.

How successful have you actually been in that area?

Not at all, despite the fact that there is a new regime in the RCN now. The RCN are still talking with the Government, how successfully we are not sure, but are still talking. We are ready to talk, but not unless we know there is more money on the table. I think the RCN line by contrast has been that whilst they are still talking there is still hope. I don't wish to drive any more wedges between ourselves and the RCN. It's fine to say that whilst we are talking there is still hope, but less people would be hurt if we all threw our weight behind the industrial campaign in order to get proper talks. The Government will have us round the negotiating table from now until eternity so long as we don't actually get any more money and they aren't shown to be the buffoons they are. Norman Fowler has been learning his industrial relations at the expense of the low paid in the Health Service.

What happened after the huge 1976 cuts demonstration suggests that keeping campaigns going after major demonstrations is a big problem. We have now seen a huge rally by the health service workers, where do you go from here?

Keeping campaigns going after huge demonstrations is always difficult. Keeping campaigns going is difficult whether you have a big demonstration or not. But having a big focal point does help to keep the campaign going longer, because it gives people something to aim towards and if it is a success they go away with a lot of drive and a lot of energy to do things. So I wouldn't want to get away from big rallies.

But how do you keep the campaign going?

Well first of all we have used Congress and will continue to use the TUC. We have used September 22 and the Labour Party Conference as high media points. The media always play a very big role and have been vital in this dispute. They have been more significant than, perhaps, in any other major recent dispute. Most importantly for the first time ever, so far as I could tell, the TUC has actually co-ordinated negotiations with the employer, has arranged meetings with the arbitration service and has used its organisational base to pressurise the TUC General Council so that on five separate occasions it has come out with circular letters to all trade unions throughout Britain calling for supportive action for the health service workers. Now that it unheard of, absolutely unheard of and it has put the TUC in the centre. That is why the Government argue about it being a political dispute. They mean that there is a danger that the TUC and its constituent trade union at long last will understand that what was on their banners was true. If you stand together, even if you do not win, you can do far better than if you stand on your own.

What lessons were learnt from the winter of discontent by the unions and the TUC that have proved valuable in this dispute?

You will know that in the winter of discontent we were very much under pressure from the TUC bureaucracy. There were meetings when we talked about being 'rubber truncheoned' over TUC sandwiches. During the winter of discontent, certainly there was not so much close coordination. We haven't been perfect in this dispute, but we have learnt the value of unity.

What have the health service unions done this time to get the public at large and members of other trade unions on their side? Lots of people thought that, however justified the struggle was in 1978/79, some of the tactics that were given publicity owed nothing to justice.

We have gone out of our way to show that we are taking this action very reluctantly. We are saying that there is justice in the cause and that there is cruelty to health service workers. Whichever government comes into power and whichever quarter it comes from, we are going to challenge it. We are going to have the dispute we are having now next year, and if not next year, the year after. This is going to go on and on until somebody does something positive about low pay.

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People are now getting the message about low pay. People are beginning to understand that all this talk about low pay means disputes in the public services every three or four years is actually true.

Could that not lead to the public being very fed up with the unions? What did the unions learn in 1978/1979 that they have been able to put into practice? This time it is being said that the trade union leadership at all levels have got much more control over the dispute. The leadership is orchestrating and leading the dispute in a much more measured way. That does not mean shutting it down, and it does not mean limiting and restricting it, but it does mean giving a positive lead. To some extent during the winter of discontent things got thrown up all over the place.

We are using what happened in 1978 and 1979 positively. Obviously we have learnt from it and we are using it. I am continuously going round and telling the tale about gravediggers who were out on strike, not burying the dead, and Peter Shore having Alan Fisher and me up at the Department of Environment. He said 'What about the dignity of the dead' I replied about the dignity of the living. All the horrible things that were said to have happened were given wild publicity. Now we see the strikers were right. They were absolutely right to do what they did and they can do it again if they chose or we chose. On this occasion, we are saying that we hope you will throw in your weight, your sympathy and your support to prevent pushing us into that position. Of course, we have also got the code of practice.

In the winter of discontent, was part of the disarray set in train when half way through a dispute, which owed little to the TUC, it tried to come in and impose a code of practice? Members in NUPE at least, and probably in all other public service unions involved, had decided that they were going to have locally negotiated cover for emergencies. They had determined that they were going to operate emergency services very much according to the particular circumstances facing their members. Then the TUC attempted to impose a code. This time the code has been generated out of contributions from the union itself. This time it has not been born out of expedience, it has been born out of organisation.

Yes. The other side of that, of course, is the unity of the unions or the approach to unity and the attempt at unity. In the winter of discontent there were pitched battles and there were unions that had their members lying down in ambulances and being driven in over picket lines in order to work. There were pitched battles between unions at local level and even at national level. We learnt a lot from that. I hope that NUPE is no less militant in 1982 than in 1978/79, neither nationally, regionally or locally. What we have been prepared to do on this occasion is to sink some of our differences for the sake of unity. Everything has been given to the cause of unity. That does not mean to say that it will always be so. If there was a whiff in the air of a compromise that NUPE thought was unreasonable, I don't say that this 'all hands together and shoulder to shoulder approach' would necessarily continue. I don't say that as a threat, but it must always be a possibility.

You were going back to unity being the main lesson that was learnt. You have not talked at all about emergency services — why not?

Why should we — to what end? We had emergency services in 1978 and 1979. It is a myth that it broke down all over the place in the winder of discontent, it did not. Obviously in any dispute like this there is pain, anguish and anxiety. But I think it is a myth that incredibly harsh things were done by the union in 1978/79. At the fringes and the margins there were instances like the grave diggers at

Tameside and Liverpool, but it was at the margin. It was not an every day regular feature of that dispute. In terms of actual hardship you will see that, on this occasion, things are worse because of the cumulative effect of the dispute. The dispute in 1978/79 lasted only six and a half weeks; this has been going on for six months. The effect on people in Britain is very much bigger with the waiting lists, for example, and St Thomas' Hospital being on the brink of closing down. Even with an accident and emergency code, the gross amount of human suffering arising from this dispute is bound to be larger than in 1978/79. That one allegedly brought the government down: this one hasn't because we have a much less caring government.

Is public opinion, what people think of in bus queues, different from 1979? You can hardly say we have got a more trade union orientated press now than in 1979. So if there is both more hardship and more public sympathy it is not because the press has been more supportive.

I do believe that the hammering the press took during and after the winter of discontent has been important. However small a factor, that must be in the equation. Somewhere, perhaps at individual reporter level, things have changed. We still have problems with the right wing press but there is less viciousness with most of the media. At least, our members think so.

Where is NUPE going after this dispute?

We have always been interested in getting together with all the trade unions in the health service. The danger is that every time anybody in NUPE mentions this, other unions run a mile. I hope they don't. We are in a quite different ball game now in the latter quarter of the twentieth century. We ought to be getting together. If NUPE says, look let's sit down and talk about mergers, amalgamations, confederations, liaisons or call it what you will, I hope that the other unions do not run amuck and say we are getting taken over by this crazy left-wing giant organisation. It is important that we all look at this issue at the TUC on the Health Services Committee, at the Local Government Committee and the Public Services Committee, so that our cooperation can turn out to be beneficial in the long term.

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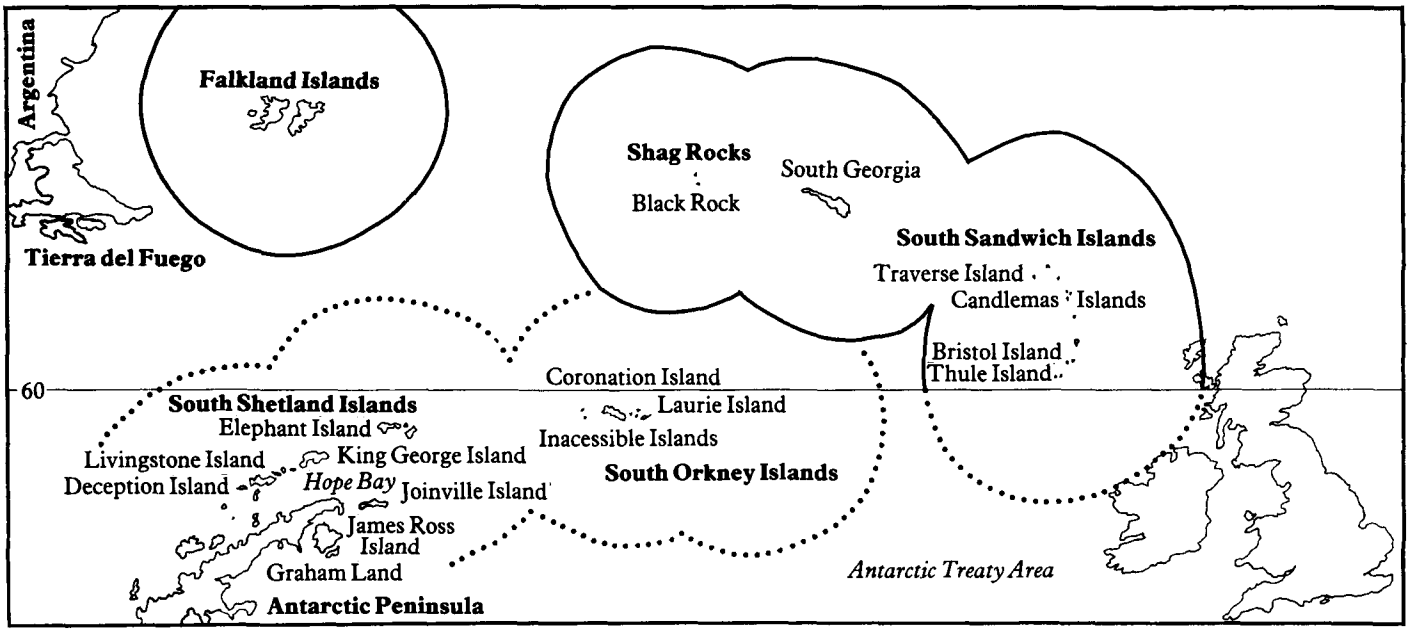
Anthony Barnett

Shackleton's Dream Islands



In his recent report, Lord Shackleton has advised the Government to establish a 200 mile fisheries limit around the Falkland Islands, South Georgia, the South Sandwich Islands, and the Shag Rocks; and also 'when it becomes practical, around the other dependencies to the South' (pp 18 and 81). What this means is shown on the map. The area enclosed by a solid line will be British fishing zones. Sovereignty claims south of 60° have been placed in abeyance by the Antarctic Treaty. The Shackleton report looks forward to the day when 'claims to sovereignty are bound to be reasserted, and there may be a need to revise the treaty (p80). Whereupon the area enclosed by the dotted line will also become a British fishing zone, if his recommendations are followed. The UK is superimposed to scale to show the area of the Atlantic that will have to be policed, not only against Argentina, but also from vessels from Japan, West Germany, Poland, and the USSR.

The Falklands War threw up many ironies, but none more pitiful than the new Shackleton Report, commissioned by Thatcher to recommend upon the future of the Islands.[1] Many people noticed that despite all its Friedmanite cant about the 'principles' of the free market, the Government doled out a huge subsidy to Cunards for the replacement of the Atlantic Conveyor. During the war there was occasional discussion of the local regulations on the Falklands. These forbid foreign nationals (meaning Argentinians) from buying land and property there, although in Britain itself such exchange controls have been abolished, again on 'principle'. But the Shackleton Report outdid all this many times over.

What was the result of Thatcher's belligerent fortitude, her military virtues and her 'principled' stand, not to speak of hundreds of deaths? Answer: the most bloated exercise in social democratic intervention and state subsidy yet devised — a veritable boondoggle of welfarism.

Even the *Daily Telegraph* concurred, if with a sigh. Shackleton, it wrote in its lead editorial the day the report was published, 'coolly tells us what in our hearts we knew all along: the Falklands will never be a goldmine'. Furthermore, it added, 'if the present inhabitants are even to stay on the islands in satisfactory employment, a large amount of money will have to be found.' You could say that again about some other islands . . .

The report's proposals have yet to be implemented, it would be hasty to leap to conclusions. All the same the Left should prepare itself to welcome one of the biggest per-capita 'give-aways' since socialism got a bad name. A Kelper family of four will have spent on the 'preservation' of its way of life close on £50,000 a year for five years — a total of nearly a quarter of a million over and above the military costs of the garrison. And still the way of life so preserved will be hard, even unpleasant.

The *Daily Telegraph*, searching for an apt conclusion to its welcome, selected the ever pertinent words of Sir Francis Drake. Britain should agree to the 'irksome' *dirigisme* of Shackleton, the 'tiers' of civil servants in a Falklands development agency, and even the compulsory purchase of the land, for: 'It is not in the beginning (meaning the war) but in the conclusion of the same, until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth true glory'.

Who is Lord Shackleton that he has come to be the architect for Thatcherism's 'true glory'? Need it be said that he is the leader of the Labour Party in the House of Lords. He is the ermined equivalent of Michael Foot and also the son of the famous explorer. Shackleton — like Foot — comes from a tradition of liberal public life, while he explains his special interest in the Falklands by the fact that his father's grave lies in South Georgia. In 1975 the son went out to the South Atlantic, at the head of a team to report on the development potential of the islands.

The next year the initial, two-volume Shackleton Report was published. Its conclusions were threefold: the development potential of the Falklands was slight; the conditions of the inhabitants deplorable; and the need to come to an agreement with Argentina over sovereignty imperative. Except for the last point, which is given considerable emphasis, the report's arguments were more gently expressed. None-

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theless, it made it clear that the grazing land on which the sheep — which produce 99% of the Islands' wealth — are fed has been slowly and steadily declining in quality and profitability. As for oil and fishing, whatever 'riches' might be obtained from the sea, the risks are very high, the conditions harsh, the situation remote and hence the potential for profits relatively moderate. At the same time, the social life of the Falklanders is described as feudal, the society there small and highly stratified, the community as having 'no glue', except for its desire to remain 'British'. The report attacks the dependency of the people as being rooted in the monopoly control of the Falkland Islands Company which has steadily drained the place of what small revenues the land has been able to generate.[2]

How has this picture changed? Between 1974 and 1980, the new report tells us, the gross domestic product of the Falklands fell by a quarter. Government income on the islands was saved from 'potential catastrophe' by £600,000 a year of 'philatelic income' — postage stamp islands indeed. The social degradation of ife seems to have continued. In 1980 there were only 26 'single girls' on the Falklands; the term the new report uses for women aged between 20 and 30.

It discusses the paucity of women in relation to the huge garrison of single men, and suggests that soldiers' wives should be brought out if possible and care be taken in the Army's community relations. There used to be a 2,000 strong garrison on the Falklands during the Second World War, which created no special problems, it points out optimistically. But recently, even the small unit of 40 personnel posted to Stanley led to 'many' marriages. The conclusion is obvious, even if not to Shackleton's team. The young women on the Islands, now aware of the lure of urban life, are choosing to leave. And when the women migrate a community loses hope. As a commentator writing about rural Ireland in the 1930s once noted: 'Few persons realise how much the stagnation of the country villages is a woman's question. Without their help every remedy is foredoomed to failure.[3]

The first Shackleton report berated the absentee farm companies for taking their profits and not investing them in the Falklands. But it backed away from proposing any radical measures. This time, in addition to a development agency, reconstruction of the harbour, etc, the team demands that the land be compulsory purchased. At the prices they are estimating, little persuasion will be needed.

The Falkland Islands are large — 4,700 square miles. Only 41 farms occupy this area, but five of them hold more than 40% of all the sheep, and the seven farms owned by the Falkland Islands Company enclose 43% of the land. Shackleton recommends that owenership be transferred to the local population, with the farms being divided up, therefore, into smaller units. Close on £20 million should be paid to the absentee landowners for the pasture and sheep. This money, supposedly designed to give the inhabitants a stake in the Islands, will of course end up in the pockets of English capitalists who have been taking money from the Falklands all along. It does not seem to have occurred to the team that just the Falkland Islands Company alone could be acquired outright from Coalite for only a few million (even supposing that anything had to be paid). More than enough land could then be made available for distribution, while the profitable stores, auction and shipping system by which the Company monopolises the trade in wool, will also fall into the community's hands.

The overall costs of more government services, improved infrastructure and the land transfer is projected at £30 — £35 million over a five year period. According to Shackleton, this is equivalent to around £3,500 'per Falkland Islander per year'. In addition £35 million has to be spent on a completely new 8,500-foot airstrip. On top of this, upwards of £40 million should be spent on the development of deep-sea fishing. Thus the figure triples.

> the most bloated exercise in social democratic intervention and state subsidy yet devised

It does not stop there, for if past history of such reports is any guide, these figures will be under-estimates. All such projects tend to be under-costed by those eager to see something started. But in addition, the report points out that a flying route has to be established with the Latin American mainland. It stresses that without such a link the Islands' prospects 'will be considerably less promising' — a delightful formulation. In a display of wisdom, the team presumes that Argentina will not itself re-establish its vital airlink to a 'British' Malvinas. The report quietly acknowledges, however, that even if another South American country should so agree, any such route will still need the permission of Buenos Aires for the use of its airspace. So it seems that the vital link is rather unlikely to be established. Costs of development will rise accordingly.

Even if we leave aside the obvious objection (namely, why spend tens of millions on fishing in the South Atlantic when fishing villages in the UK are being decimated through government inaction?) the price of any Shackleton type improvement in the Falklands mounts over and above his estimates. For not only are the figures in his report likely to rise, if implemented, the population base on which they are calculated is anyway misleading. There may be 1,800 civilians on the Falklands, but many are British posted there with no intention of staying for the rest of their lives. In 1980, only 1,300 of the community had actually been *born* on the Falklands, which is the proper definition of a Kelper.[4] Shackleton's estimates for expenditure by 1990 thus rise to close on £25,000 for every Kelper — man, woman and child — and to £50,000 if we include the airport, prior to *any* investment in deep-sea fishing.

In the name of 'self-determination', could not the Government ask the Kelpers whether they might not prefer to take just half this money to build homes for themselves in the United Kingdom? Unlike a giant airstrip this would at least improve their standard of living.

Of course not! We must take these matters more seriously. Honour is at stake. And anyway, back here, peoples' way of life is being destroyed, whereas we have fought to ensure that the Kelper's form of existence be preserved.

Now when it comes to oil things are different. But that is quite understandable. Everything has its limits. As Shackleton's report quite rightly states, before oil companies could be 'prepared to invest the large sums of money required to explore in such areas', it is clear that, 'the industry requires to have a reasonable stable political and licensing regime'. Britain does not need such a precondition to invest even larger sums . . . Or does it? Perhaps the lesson of the Shackleton Report is that, after all, you cannot build imperialism in one country. If so, in the end it will be British sovereignty over the Falklands, at least in its singular fashion, that 'yieldeth'. □

[1] *Falkland Islands Economic Study*, Chairman, Lord Shackleton, HMSO Sept 1982.

[2] See *Iron Britannia*, a special issue of *New Left Review*, pp 78—81, shortly to be published in book form by Allison & Busby.

[3] Quoted in Hugh Brody, *Inishkillane* p 98 (New edition from Jill Norman & Hobhouse, 1982).

[4] 'The 1980 census showed a population of 1,813 of which 1,360 were born in the Islands and 302 in Britain', *The Falkland Islands and Dependencies*, Reference Services, Central Office of Information, March 1982, p 1.

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Stuart Hall

A Long Haul

With Mrs Thatcher thirteen points ahead in the opinion polls and the shadow of election year beginning to lengthen over the political scene, it is certainly time the Left undertook a little radical self-examination and began to calculate the chances of reversing some of the more worrying trends. There are many immediate questions to worry about. Can Labour stage a recovery and build on it? Will the unions survive the Tebbit onslaught intact? But these short term issues are connected to deeper, longer term questions which can't be kept seperate. Are we in the middle of a profound secular shift in the disposition of political forces? Can the mass party of the working class survive in its present form? Is the structure of the working class changing? Is the working class movement basically in good shape, despite its little local difficulties?

Unemployment

Many on the left are still relying on unemployment as the magical 'material factor' which will undercut Thatcherism's ideological ascendancy. But unemployment has failed to deliver any such unequivocal political result. In 1979 the swing to the Conservatives was highest amongst those who had been unemployed between 1974 and 1979: 14.5%. The long term impact of unemployment is devastating on all the sections of the population which it touches. But its immediate impact seems to be somewhat softened by the higher levels of benefits as compared with the 1930s — though that, contrary to the myth, did not precipitate a mass working class shift to the left either.

At a deeper level, three conclusions can be drawn. First, people are not wholly convinced that unemployment is attributable exclusively to Tory mismanagement or monetarist dogma. They know that the short term figures conceal worrying trends towards deep, structural unemployment. Second, unemployment is having paradoxical political consequences. It has stimulated national protest and some growth in militancy. But it has also helped the Government to hold the line on wages, damped down industrial militancy, driven a wedge between the employed and the unemployed, men and women, black and white, isolated militant shop steward leadership in the workplace and exposed their industrial base to managerial blackmail. Workers do not believe in it, but they are nevertheless being compelled by it. Third, it underscores the point that, in general, there is no automatic transfer from the 'material' to the 'ideological' poles. Unemployment does not guarantee rising militancy any more than pure class position guarantees voting behaviour

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Is the working class movement basically in good shape, despite its little local difficulties?

or political support. In between the two lies the indeterminate terrain of politics, where these connections can be won or lost, depending on how struggles are conducted and what the balance of political forces turns out to be. This challenges a good deal of thinking in the labour movement where a certain vulgar economism is still firmly rooted.

A structural problem

It is precisely this automatism which is now falling apart. It is assumed that the old structure of support, the historic connections which sustained the Labour Party and the trade union movement are still in place, though somewhat disarranged. Unity, better policies, more effective leadership, material circumstances themselves will restore the organic connections between party and movement, on the one hand, and the classes, social forces and popular movements which they seek to represent. But there is growing evidence that it is precisely these relations of representation which are fracturing. This is not because of a swing in the electoral cycle but a result of fundamental, structural, historical and ecological factors — accelerated and telescoped, as Tony Lane recently argued in *Marxism Today*, by more immediate factors. In what follows, I want to examine some of those underlying trends. It is because the problems are not temporary or superficial that, far from a crisis of the system provoking a revival of the Left, the crisis of the capitalist system and the crisis of the working class movement are proceeding together, in tandem, mirroring and feeding off one another.

First there is the crisis of political representation in simple electoral terms. Labour's share of the vote is steadily declining. 1979 was the third consecutive election in which it fell below 40% of the electorate. In 1979 only one in three manual workers voted Labour and a majority of working class voters opted for another party. The percentage swing to the Conservatives was 6.5 among semi-skilled workers, 7% among trade unionists, 11% among skilled manual workers, 9.5% among men, 3% among women, 9.5% among those aged 18-22. Clearly, the circumstances surrounding the last election were rather special — acutely combining short term calculation and long term 'drift'. Also, the working class vote has always, historically, contained a significant proportion of Tory voters, ever since the Conservatives resolved that they would have to forge the working class connection if the party were to survive the coming of mass democracy. Earlier connections were forged through paternalism, deference, self-interest, patriotic sentiment; more recently, through a revived neo-liberalism, touching the daily realities of competition and individualism — 'the sharpest weapon against the proletariat in the hands of the bourgeoisie', as Engels once said. Nevertheless, in any long term electoral perspective, the underlying trends must be deeply worrying. Labour seems incapable of becoming a national popular political force, commanding the votes of the popular majority. The SDP-Liberal Aliance will exacerbate this problem. Specifically, Labour is losing votes in exactly those class, strata and social categories required if it is to achieve that kind of electoral leadership. Its defeat in 1979 was, specifically, achieved by the penetration of the radical Right into the very heartland of its support and, as Ivor Crewe recently remarked, 'a massive haemmorage of working class votes.

Changing composition

But — second — the party-class relationship cannot be adequately caught or expressed in electoral terms alone. More significant are the political relations between movement and class — specifically, the way changes in the structure and composition of the working class are likely to affect the industrial structure and political culture of the labour movement. Again, historicaly, this is by no means the first period in which the working class has been fundamentally recomposed. We have seen this process at work at different phases throughout the history of industrial capitalism. The composition of the working class is always shaped by the capitalist division of labour, the pace and direction of technical change, the economic organisation of industry; above all, by the *unevenness* which marks the impact of all these factors on class formation. Periods of economic crisis or recession, like the 1890s or the 1930s, are precisely the conditions under which the restructuring of industry and the recomposition of the class takes place. We are in the middle of another such phase now.

Let us consider one aspect of class recomposition, to illustrate the point. Skilled male manual workers now represent a declining proportion of the labour force. This represents the numerical decline of a key sector of industrial and political support. It also coincided with the general decline of those sectors of the economy where skilled workers of this type predominated, and with the decline of those geographical regions which constituted the industrial heartland of the early labour movement.

Now these were not only sectors and regions of strong electoral loyalty to Labour. Their union strength and the density of the occupational communities associated with them provided the movement with its social infrastructure. They remain 'solid' in terms of Labour support, as the geography of the swing to Thatcherism reveals: the Labour vote held in Scotland, in the industrial north; it was weak even in the car and engineering-dominated Midlands; and weakest in London and the south. There is no long term consolation there. It means that the labour movement is most solid where industrial decline in general in deepest. Its roots are most shallow, its political support thinnest, in those sectors linked with the prosperous industries of the long postwar boom, the new technologies and in the few places where, despite recession, foreign investment in green sites or high-tec is taking place.

The implications are also ecological and cultural. For this skilled and semi-skilled manual working class stratum defined the dominant patterns of industrial unionism at a formative stage of the labour movement. It is also where the traditions of militancy and struggle are nurtured in the popular memory of the movement. It also defined the *culture* of the working class movement. Its ecology often depended on those occupational communities, where work, labour process, family and community ties, leisure and recreation, loyalty to locality and place overlapped and mutually reinforced one another. Through these informal networks a particular cultural pattern was transmitted into the heart of the culture of the working class movement. We are talking, then, not just about numbers and votes, but about a shift in industrial, political and cultural weight.

But recomposition means, not only (negatively) the relative decline of some sectors, but (positively) the relative proportional growth of others: and the resulting shift in balance and composition between the different elements. The new majorities in the working class will inevitably be drawn from different sectors, where a new division of labour prevails. Large numbers will come from the service and public sectors, where unionisation, bargaining (often with the local or national state, or state agencies) and political culture are very different.

Two contradictory tendencies

We have been considering some aspects of class recomposition and its industrial, political and cultural impact. But another aspect is the

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impact of some of these new developments on the sectionalism and fragmentation of the class. The labour movement has always, historically, reflected, in its diversity and sectoral divisions, the ways in which workers are inserted into competing enterprises, into particular kinds of labour process, a particular division of labour, a particular organisation of the capitalist firm or enterprise, and a particular division of grades, crafts, skills. Each has helped, historically, to strengthen and deepen the internal sectoralism of the class, and thereby its reformism. This 'fractioning' and diversity is the real, empirical experience of the class: the class in its singular, already-unified form, is really a political metaphor. In fact two contradictory tendencies have been at work. On the one hand, the tendency to concentrate larger numbers of workers in the enterprise, the mass-collective worker, based on the maximisation of scale, advanced mechanisation, 'fordist' development in flow-line and fast-assembly processes, and the dilution of older craft-related skills. On the other hand, at each stage, a new division of labour, new hierarchies of supervisory and technical function, new distinctions and divisions.

Working class 'sectoralism' has been reflected throughout the development of modern industry in the craft-based structure of the trade unions themselves and in the break-up of occupations into different traditions of craft and skill, mediated by status difference, but preserved as the focus of occupational pride and self-identity. It has helped to sustain the reformism and economism of the labour movement by stimulating competition between different sections of the class, turning it inward into compromises and negotiation within the class.

The long boom and recession

All the factors we have been discussing in relation to the fracturing and recomposition of the working class have been shaped by specific historical factors: first, by the experience of the long boom — then by recession. Money wages rose during the 1950s and early 60s. Unions took advantage of the circumstances of full employment to exploit their bargaining power. But at the same time, leap-frogging, exploiting the 'drift' between local and national wage agreements, or between one plant and another, playing the 'differentials' game, and the 'special case' argument all helped to reinforce the separation of one part of the class from another, setting 'leading' sectors against the low-paid. On the other hand, the experiences and conditions of the long boom did help to strengthen the unions and widen membership. The picture is therefore somewhat contradictory. Ultimately, however, sectionalism undermined movement towards the unity of the class across these internal divisions and cross-cut any attempt to break across the sacred 'industrial/political' divide which keeps the industrial wing relatively depoliticised and robs the political wing, strategically, of its weight and power.

That was under boom conditions. But now the process is compounded by the period of recession which has followed. Deindustrialisation is hastening regional decline. Unemployment will hasten the permanent loss of skill. The new technologies will follow investment into areas where there are no strong traditions of trade union militancy, even though the unions will certainly try to unionise them. The further diversification of the capitalist enterprise — on regional and international lines — will increase fragmentation and geographical dispersal. The trade unions have been trying hard to adapt, but they may not have reshuffled themselves speedily or fundamentally enough to match the impact of the present accelerated reshaping of industry.

Opening to the new

It would be easy to simplify and exaggerate these trends. It is difficult to strike the right balance in assessing so complex a picture, especially when so much is at stake, politically. To refer to the relative decline of a particular sector of a class is not to launch a political attack on those who have sustained the labour movement for so long and without whose political and industrial muscle the working class movement would be hopelessly exposed. It is perceived as the leading fraction or the 'vanguard' of the class, because this is the role which it has played for so long. At the same time, it should be evident what risks we run if the movement continues to have real roots only in the declining sections of a class. It *must* reflect — in organisation and culture — the real diversity and complexity of class formation. Its historic commitments cannot prevent it from centrally engaging occupational patterns and cultures thrown up by the new capitalist division of labour. It must discover ways of reflecting, in its social values, both the tight solidarities of the old communities and the greater diversity and openness of the new. This is not merely a banal search for 'modernity': a labour movement which is not sufficiently open to allow the currents of modern life, which are influencing and shaping its members, to blow through its structures and procedures is living off its past at the expense of the future.

The patriarchialism of leadership, hierarchy and authority which so strongly marks earlier styles of political and industrial organisation will not survive the impact

In this context, it is worth looking at some of the more established cultural characteristics of the labour movement. For example, some of the older occupational communities maintain a particular sexual division of labour, a tight set of familiar roles and loyalties. Working class unity and labour movement fraternity have often been underpinned by certain versions of masculinity, traditionalism and domestic respectability. One has to recognise *both* what this set of mutual supports has achieved, understand why, historically, the one fed into the other in this way. But one also has to acknowledge its limitations, and recognise the changes, the emergent patterns.

The newer industrial strata are certain to be politically and culturally more diverse. They will certainly, for example, reflect the rising proportion of women in the workforce, and thus the growing place of part-time work and 'feminised' work roles. The labour movement must therefore prepare itself for a massive adaptation to new needs and demands — for example, the demand for greater flexibility in work organisation. The unions in general will have increasingly to take up new topics for negotiation and press for new requirements in conditions of employment. It also follows, I suspect, that the *patriarchalism of* of leadership, hierarchy and authority which so strongly marks earlier styles of political and industrial organisation will not survive the impact. The labour movement will also reflect the wider social aspirations which women rightly and inevitably are developing: partly as a result of a historical shift in the relations between the sexes; partly as a result of the equalisation of rights; partly as a response to the diverse impact of the consumer revolution; partly as a direct influence from the women's movement.

What is at issue here is ultimately the politics of *constructing* the unity of a class — and in a recognisably present and modern, not simply historical, form. Heroic attachments to the past will serve for tall stories in the working men's club, but may not have much living connection to the real problems of class, party and movement today. The importance of 'leading sections' in the past is not at issue. But we must be concerned by the way in which the organic link between movement and class has become identified with one particular class constellation, frozen at only one moment of its historic devel-

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opment. It is as if, when the working class no longer *looks* exactly like the factory operatives in the illustrations to Engels' *Condition Of The Working Class* we lose confidence that we will be able to recognise its existence at all.

New cultural patterns

Everything we have been saying has political consequences of a broad kind. But there remains the process of political condensation itself. Much has been written about the political complexities of the Labour Party, but less about its social infrastructure. Here, too, profound processes of social and political change have been at work. It is perfectly true that neither the impact of affluence in the immediate postwar years nor the redistributive reformism and corporatism of Labour's years of dominance brought about 'a fundamental shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of the working people'. Nevertheless, now that the sterile elements of the so-called 'affluence' debate have subsided, we have to try to find terms adequate to describe real processes of social change which were neither radical nor fundamental nor structural — but which nevertheless shifted things or set new patterns in motion.

Such social mobility as occurred was largely the result of service and non-manual occupations replacing the manual skilled trades indentified with the 'solid' working class. But shifts in the boundaries and imagaries of class are not without their political and ideological consequences. Full employment and the welfare state did not destroy the foundations of class and equality in our society. But they set certain supports in position and gave, while they lasted, a certain room for manoeuvere in a class whose previous experience had been largely determined by uncertain unemployment and permanent insecurity. The massive concentration of capital and the expansion of market in the consumption industries were primarily geared to the exploitation of new social strata. But the unintended consequences of widening choice and increasing the fluidity of social life which is characteristic of periods of relatively high consumption made an indelible impression. Class inequalities, distinctions and differences did not disappear. Indeed, in many ways, they were exquisitely refined. But the interweaving of class with status distinctions, the growth of distinct sub-cultures, the differential access to goods, services and resources did give for a time a greater relative openness to social life.

Continuing features

What forces then, continue to sustain the traditionalist character of the working class movement? First, there is the corporate class character of the culture from which the labour movement has most directly drawn its strength. Its corporateness has weaknesses and limitations which are the reverse of, but inextricably combined with, its strength. What made it corporately strong and binding also made it closed, self-reliant, locked into the parameters of 'us' and 'them'. It is not a culture which has ever seemed capable of assuming a national-popular leadership or of refashioning bourgeuis culture in its image. It is not a culture on to which it would be easy to graft the loosely framed cultures of modern consumer societies; or which would be hospitable to cultures of the class which were organised around different values — white unemployed youth or West Indian or Asian urban cultures, for example. It remains essentially non-hegemonic. And that character is given as much by social relationships outside the workplace — in family and community life, 'education, tradition and habit' as Marx remarked — as within it.

Second, there is the fact of the internal divisions and stratification of the class; the sectionalism which we explored earlier. Sectionalism is a better explanation of the reformism of the working class than the 'labour aristocracy' or 'ideological colonisation by the bourgeoisie concepts because it reminds us that ideology always works on real material factors not illusions.

Sectionalism is inscribed in the spatial separations of the 'enclave' community cultures and occupations which I described. But of course it was powerfully reinforced by the divisions by craft and skill, which became, as well, *foci* of social identity, symbols of sectional loyalty, and pride. Both these aspects were overlaid by the strongest fragmenting force of all: the fact that labour confronts capital in different and highly differentiated workplaces, so that the nature of capital as experienced varies profoundly as between one sector of industry and another.

This has the effect of internalising negotiations, the compromises, advantages and trade-offs *within* the class, rather than solidifying the links, across different sectors. The experience of daily negotiations is the root instinct on which reformism feeds. The latter therefore arises *within* the sectors and strata of the class itself, as well as being imposed on the class from forces outside it.

Labourism

The third factor we would isolate is organisational. In one sense, this refers to the hierarchical nature of the movement: its reliance on formal organisational procedures, on hierarchies of command and communication, and on an exaggerated respect for office and position which is fundamentally at odds with its democratic character. Again, the two contradictory impulses are often inextricably mixed. The impulses which led to the forms of working class organisation — rule books, rules of procedure, delegation and 'reporting-back' — may seem outdated in the light of the modern fashion for looser structures and more open (some would add, more irresponsible?) participatory democracy. But they were, at root, fundamentally democratic in origin. On the other hand, in their actual operation, they preserve a certain formalism, constitutionalism in the modes of operation, which may be formally accountable to its members, but which lowers democratic access and participation.

Finally, one must reckon with the nature of Labourism itself — the contradictory, but indigenous and authentic reformist political ideology, which organises the universe of the labour movement. It is a mistake to see Labourism as simply the result of the impact of the reformist middle classes on the working class, for, in one sense, it is *par excellence* the political ideology appropriate to a strong but corporate working class. On the other hand, in one of its aspects, it does demonstrate the crossing of working class with a particular brand of middle-class 'progressivist' politics. 'Labourism' cannot be defined outside of the historic compromise which working class independency struck, at a certain historical moment, with Fabian collectivism. The latter imparted an indelible political colouration to the whole formation. It is intrinsically statist — reforms will be brought from above by the state through experts for the working class. Its effect is the *demobilisation* of *working class political self-activity.* Each is of course the reverse side of the other. The first produces 'socialism' and reform from outside and from above. It centralises politics in the state, while at the same time depoliticising the state. The second insists that, apart from electoral activity and consistent displays of loyalty, the class must not, on any account, be roused from its historic slumbers. It must not mobilise on its own account; power must not pass out of the keeping of its guardians, and seep down the ladder into the hands of ordinary folks. The sound of clients encroaching on the authority of the experts, of shop stewards getting notions of their own capacities above and beyond their station as relayers of power from elsewhere, of tenants who speak back to housing managers, workers who want to see the colour of a company's investments, pickets that refuse to stand still, sectors that won't subscribe to pay norms, women who won't settle to their

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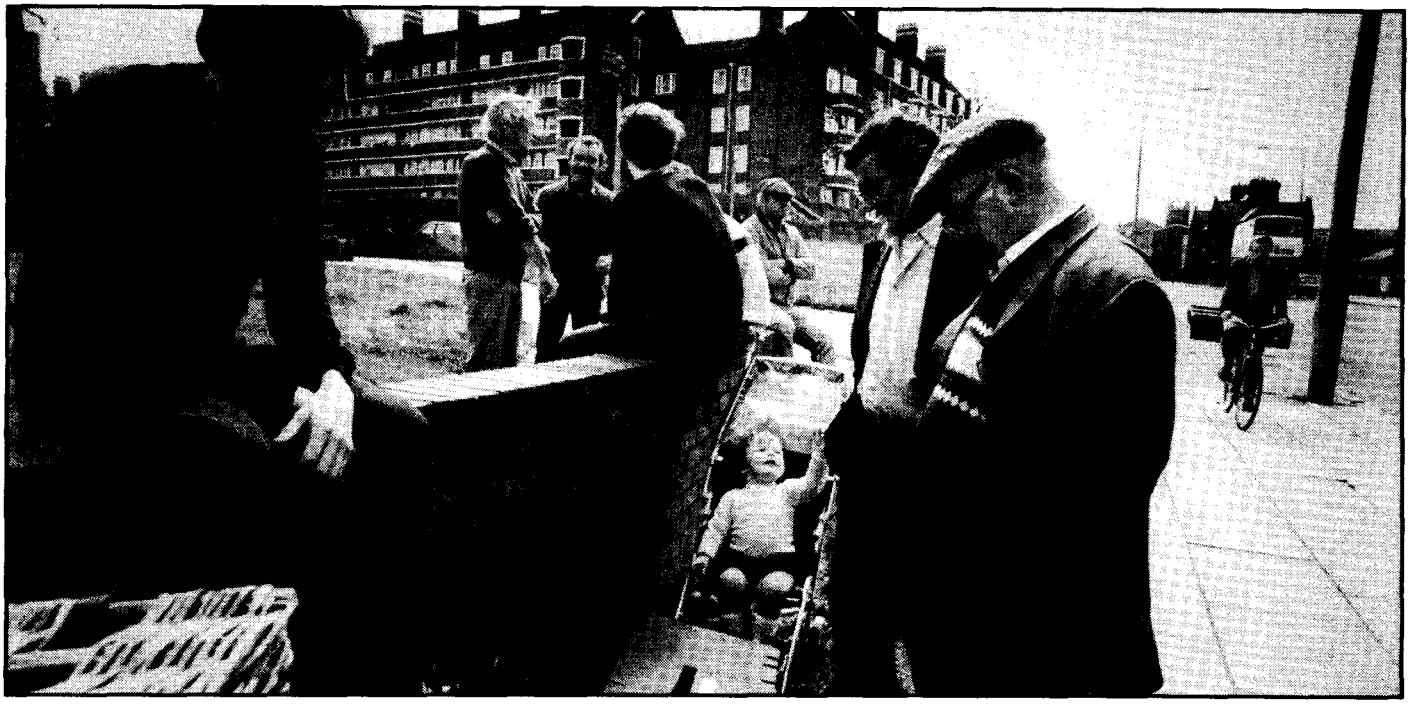

familial roles, blacks who assert their own self identities — the sound, in short, of the class in motion, of the democratic initiatives passing to the forces below — is a sound which has made Fabian consciences shudder and Fabianist nerves rattle down the ages. It is, of course, the mechanism by which democracy has been both 'represented' and 'deflected' at the very core and centre of the working class movement since it came to its maturity.

The offering for the future

We have moved, in this essay, from the immediate parameters of the 'crisis' to exploring some of its underlying, deeper, more structural features. In each aspect, I am aware of gross over-simplification in order to make a point or give substance to an impression. The language hardly permits us to express things dialectically — in their true contrariness, double-sideness, in their positive and negative — at the same time. The picture *is* impressionistic, and I hope it might provoke those who are much better equipped to speak on each of its aspects to correct, disagree or counterpose a different interpretation to the one I have given. I have offered the piece, essentially, for discussion and debate, not for polemic or to make a point; and for two reasons. First, because I am sure that the crisis the working class movement faces is not immediate and tactical but structural and long term. Second, because I deduce from what I have said that the historic task before us is not to shore up what we have or to make happen again what happened before, but to transform the movement into a political instrument which seems capable of dividing the country for socialism and beginning the movement towards it, not in the previous century but in *the next.* □

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Britain is not like France. The Union Jack is quite different from the Tricolour. But the Left still has to come to terms with the 'nation'

Robert Gray

Left holding the Flag

The Left was ill-equipped to respond to the Falklands war. The popular chauvinism which Thatcher elicited and directed was not simply the product of manipulation by the Tories and the media. It had deeper historical roots, and appealed to areas of experience the Left has largely failed to address. Whatever the longer term effects of the Falklands adventure, it surely illustrates the capacity of the Right to mobilise national feeling and the weakness of the Left in countering this.

This failure reflects real difficulties. The dominant definitions of national interest were composed from a long history not of our making. In Britain, perhaps more than most European countries, national identity belongs to the Establishment, and creates effective links between it and the people. To break these links, and to create a new sense of identity will involve a response to the reality of the nation rather than what Dimitrov called 'national nihilism' in the name of an abstract internationalism.[1] Such nihilism serves only to reinforce the identification of the ruling class with the interests of the nation. Not only does this leave open the possibility of further episodes of military adventurism, with all its attendant dangers, it also impoverishes our ability to offer a meaningful vision of the future. For it is partly through conceptions of the nation and its future that people form their social aspirations. A re-definition of the interests of the nation around the alternative leadership of the working class is thus central if the working class is to 'fulfil its role of the leading force in society'.[2]

If there are great difficulties in this area, there are also important opportunities. The long crisis of British imperialism has also thrown into crisis a sense of nationhood normally mobilised by the Right. This presents the Left with an opportunity to challenge the claim of its opponents to speak for the nation. The condition of seizing that opportunity is that we begin to address seriously the reality of British nationhood and its historical determinants.

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Empire, Patriotism and Chauvinism

The Falklands war was simply the latest expression of the historic capacity of the Right to deploy popular nationalism for its own political ends. This has been a marked feature of British history, and one that distinguishes Britain from other countries. Episodes of right-ring popular nationalism can of course be found throughout Europe — most dramatically in the shape of fascism — but the Right's claim to speak for the nation has rarely gone uncontested; the histories of revolution and counter- revolution, fascism, occupation and resistance have produced symbols of national identity to which the Left can lay claim.

The association of national identity with the Right is thus a product of history, not a law of nature. And that history is more complex than simple manipulation from above. The ruling class has been largely successful, down to the present, in incorporating the mass of the population through a sense of national community and loyality. But this process has involved conflicts, both about class, gender and other social relationships within the national community, and about the problems encountered by ruling groups in sustaining their definition of Britain's place in the world. These conflicts have grown more acute with the long crisis of British imperialism.

Continuity and stability

The surface continuity and stability of the English, and subsequently British state and its key institutions since the late seventeenth century is one determinant of the inherited identity of the British people. Problems of territorial unification or rigid institutional barriers to the emergence of a modern state which faced most other European nations had, historically, been resolved by the nineteenth century emergence of nationalism as a political force. The process of 'nation-building', the construction of national identities through the contention of rival social classes and ideologies is close to the surface in many European nations; in Britain, similar processes occurred, but in a characteristically gradualist manner, masked by the facade of institutional continuity.

The collective memory of the seventeenth-century revolution was purged of its radical overtones, assimilated to Victorian moderate liberalism. Although the growth of industrial capitalism brought bitter conflicts, and moments of deep crisis, the resulting changes in the political system were presented within the facade of continuity and gradual adaptation. The subsequent extension of political rights to parts of the adult male working class maintained the tradition of gradualism. Thus the incorporation of new groups — male members of the urban middle classes in the 1830s, some male workers from the late 1860s, all adult men and then women in the inter-war years — modified but did not dramatically displace existing institutions and elites.

Popular

If the potentially radical implications of political democracy were successfully contained down to the present, it was nevertheless not simply managed from above. A deep-rooted and tenacious sense of popular rights and liberties was formed in the ferment of the seventeenth-century revolution, ran half-underground through the eighteenth-century and surfaced as a broad stream in the popular radicalism of the late eighteenth and nineteeth centuries. There was thus a popular version of English constitutionalism, expressed in a long struggle for free organisations, self-expression, and above all the vote. In this respect the feeling of membership of the nation cannot be separated from the demand, often sharply expressed, to participate in its affairs. As Hugh Cunningham has shown, 'patriotism' in the late eighteenth and early to mid-nineteeth centuries had oppositional and radical, and sometimes even republican and internationalist overtones.[3]

With the mid-nineteeth century stabilisation of British society, appeals to popular patriotism figured in the rhetoric of political leaders, incorporating elements of the popular radical tradition into the established political parties. This kind of incorporation could, and did *precede* the extension of the vote. Thus Lord Palmerston in the 1850s and 60s, an aristocratic whig and staunch opponent of democratic reform, was a notable exponent of appeals to popular patriotic feeling. Libertarianism and sympathy for national and democratic struggles abroad were bound up with maritime isolationism and a sense of national superiority, the image of a free, progressive protestant nation contrasted to despotic, backward regimes elsewhere. Thus popular libertarianism and popular chauvinism, the 'good' and 'bad' sides of the national character, are hard to disentangle from each other; it is a potent ideological mix, as can be seen as recently as the Falklands war.

Empire

Popular chauvinism is related to the way that British society has been deeply penetrated, at every level, by successive phases of imperial expansion, from colonial plunder, the slave-trade and plantations in the seventeenth centuries to industrial supremacy, free trade and overseas investment in the nineteenth century; and to the activities of British-based multinationals in more recent years. The very making of a nation-state, in the Tudor period and then in the crucible of the English Revolution, belongs to the first of these phases. Indeed the fusion of popular libertarianism and popular chauvinism can perhaps be traced back to the notion of a free protestant island people — mythologically presented as the underdogs, outclassed in everything except skill, courage and divine favour — defying the empires of continental despots. In doing so the English, and increasingly their Scottish junior partners were of course quite consciously and deliberately seizing a still greater empire for themselves.

The heyday of empire from the 1880s to the First World War represents a later phase, to which Lenin referred in his *Imperialism*. In the British case this was superimposed, partly in response to the rival imperialism of new competitors, on a long prior history of colonial expansion.[4] This intensifying imperialist rivalry coincided with the partial democratisation of the political system, and the growth of working-class

the Right's claim to speak for the nation has rarely gone uncontested

organisation and political self-assertion. Historians continue to debate the impact of various attempts to win enthusiastic popular support for the imperial state.[5] The strongest support for ultra-jingoism seems to have come from the growing white collar strata, who gave the Tories a suburban popular electoral base; the high noon of empire also saw a continuing sense of working class alienation and some bitter industrial confrontations. On the other hand, the working class could not but be affected by the imperialist orientation of British capital and its state; there was significant complicity in, if not positive enthusiasm for, the empire and its real or imagined economic benefits.

If working people maintained a healthy scepticism and failed to transform them-

[1] *Report to the Seventh Congress of the Communist International* (1935).

[2] *British Road to Socialism*, p33.

[3] H Cunningham, 'The Language of Patriotism', *History Workshop Journal* 12 (autumn 1981).

[4] Lenin's account does not entirely fit the British case, which had for example the greatest empire but the least development of trusts and cartels prior to 1914.

[5] See Cunningham, *op cit*, pp23-27 for a perceptive summary and assessment.

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selves into model subjects of the imperial state, there was nevertheless an effective level of consent enabling the ruling class to mobilise popular support. This support rested on a variety of appeals and loyalities — of class, region, community, Scottish or Welsh identity — bound together by a diffuse sense of loyalty and civic duty, a 'willingness to accept what the state demanded of you'.[6] As became clear in the First World War, this did not override the commitments of class, but defined a framework within which class interests were expressed. The war years saw both a 'reformist' re-negotiation of the place of organised labour in society and politics, bringing real gains, and the emergence of a more cohesive Marxist left.

The national identity formed by imperialist rivalry and crisis and the entry of the masses into political life was reinforced and perpetuated by the success in two world wars, and more recently in the series of military actions which have policed the dismantling of the formal empire since 1945. With the long crisis of decline, the imperial national identity has been eroded and undermined, but never displaced, still less subjected to any thorough critique. Decline has been 'a history of graduated decay, relatively unmaked by trauma'.[7] There have been a number of debacles and and crises of confidence, of which the radicalism evoked by the Second World War and widespread revulsion from the disasters of the 30s was the most important. But the establishment never suffered a catastrophe comparable to that of military defeat and occupation elsewhere in Europe.

There three elements — the continuity of the state and key institutions, combined with gradual adaptation and incorporation of new social classes; the strong sense of popular rights; and the long history of empire — mark off the British experience from that of countries where the Left has been able to incorporate into its politics symbols of national identity. The tricolour, from 1793 to 1848 to the Paris Commune in 1871, to the wartime resistance has been the property of the Left, while the *Marseillaise* was sung as a revolutionary anthem by radicals and socialists everywhere throughout the nineteenth centuy. The union jack and *God Save the Queen* have rarely evoked comparable enthusiasms! Rather, the British Left has been caught between a justifiable, but isolating sense of distance from popular chauvinism and attempts to address national feeling that slide into an uncritical assimilation of dominant traditions.

THE POST-IMPERIAL CRISIS

To transform the sense of identity composed out of this history is not easy. Yet the construction of that identity has never been complete, or without contradictions. And the problems surrounding national identity have multiplied with the decline of British economic and military power, the incoherence of various attempts to adapt to this, and the economic and social costs, borne by working people, of ruling class policies. The crisis of national identity is an expression of the crisis of British capitalism, and it is this form of expression, as well as the underlying economic crisis, which the Left must address to set Britain on a new course.

Britain and the world

The central strategy since 1945 has been adaptation to the augmented economic and military power of the USA, as a means to the perpetuation of Britain's independent status as a 'great power.[8] More recently, and hesitantly, as this strategy failed to resolve the underlying weakness of the domestic economy, there has been the move into the EEC; this again has been combined with the maintenance of 'great power' military postures. Attempts at adaptation have thus gone hand in hand with maintaining the orientation of British capital to overseas investment and the military presence of Britain as a world power and the main lieutenant of the US in 'containing communism' and policing the Third World.

This posture has not always been a coherent one, and there have been a number of debacles reflecting the gulf between military pretension and economic capability, the contradictions of independent 'great power' status bought at the price of subservience to US policies, and so on. The Suez affair, which marked the beginnings of a reappraisal, is perhaps the clearest example of these problems. With the slowing down of the long boom in the mid to late 1960s and growing instability in the international economic system, it became harder to ignore the underlying weaknesses of the British economy, or the hollowness of British claims to an imperial role. The 60s saw a wave of agonised introspection about the 'British disease', the need to find a new, more realistic role, etc, which contributed to the Labour victories of 1964 and 1966 under the banner of 'modernisation'.

So far as Britain's place in the world was concerned, the main alternatives to a hollow and bankrupt imperial role were defined by a 'modernising' technocratic political centre, pushing 'Atlanticist' and/or 'European' options. These policies would have abandoned British independent 'great power' status in favour of closer integration in NATO and/or the EEC. These strategies of adaptation to diminished power were not consistently pursued. This was partly because of conflict between an emphasis on the 'Atlantic' (ie, NATO/USA) or 'European' (ie, EEC) connections. (De Gaulle's veto on British entry to the EEC was partly based on fears that Britain would represent American interests in Europe). Perhaps more important was the lack of a sufficiently strong drive within British politics; both major parties were at that time divided over the EEC — and in the Labour Party the

division was not simply between Left and Right — and there was a determination in influential circles to hold on to the 'independent deterrent' and a world power role. Eventual entry to the EEC reinforced the international orientation of British capital, rather than bringing about the promised regeneration of British industry. The failure of the state-led 'modernising' strategy of the 1960s, then of Heath's attempt to stimulate growth through the market, left the field clear for Thatcherism. The Left in this period played an important part in opposition to the EEC, as well as to NATO and nuclear weapons. But these campaigns were

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not integrated into a coherent alternative course for a post-imperial Britain.

Internal cohesion and the national question

The other aspect of post-imperial crisis has been the challenge to traditional definitions of the British nation-state: Ireland, the national movements in Scotland and Wales, racism and black resistance. The emergence of national movements within the UK reflects the particularly catastrophic impact

on Scotland and Wales of the decline of British capitalism, but also the politicisation of a sense of cultural identity which had historically been a component of the unitary British state and of British political parties (notably the Liberals in the late nineteenth century, to a lesser extent Labour since the First World War). This earlier period was one of boom and expansion for British industry, with the industrial regions of Scotland and Wales riding the crest of the wave. In more recent years the decline of British industry, the growth of state intervention and the centralisation of political and economic decision-making have threatened to erode the communities on which Scottish and Welsh nationhood are based. National aspirations have therefore found separate political expression.

Thus, although the national movements are related to the economic crisis, they cannot be reduced to it. National feeling is more than a protest vote based on economic discontents, acute as these are. It will not melt away with the rising sun of a Labour government implementing the alternative economic strategy. Indeed the growth of national consciousness, which is by no means confined to people who vote SNP or Plaid Cymru, is in part an attempt to influence the very shape of any economic recovery, the form and direction of investment and its impact on communities and cultures. The national movements have specific political and cultural dimensions. They are questioning the historic institutional form of the association between the component nations of the UK, and the capacity of parties, parliament and other central institutions to represent the aspirations of the Scottish and Welsh peoples.

RECONSTRUCTING THE NATION

The pressures and challenges of the later twentieth century have made inherent common sense definitions of the British nation problematical. The ruling class, and political leaders of both major parties, long clung to an obsolescent imperialist posture as a 'great power' and world financial centre. As cracks appeared in this edifice — for example the crisis of confidence that followed Suez — there was much agonised introspection, but a failure, in the dominant parts of the political spectrum, to define a coherent and realistic alternative to the imperial role. Ordinary people felt a sense of drift, disintegration and decline.

There has been a breakdown of traditional definitions of British national identity. These traditional definitions, which were formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and retained their broad appeal at least down to the 1950s, gave space for the expression of a plurality of identities and loyalties while organising them around the policies of an imperial ruling class. Since the 1960s, this central national identity has become less effective in expressing the diverse identities and cultures of Britain's peoples. The main UK political parties are no longer credible vehicles for Scottish and Welsh national feelings. The crisis of Northern Ireland has shattered the unity of the loyalist Unionist bloc and its integration into UK Conservatism. Black communities have struggled both against the overt racism expressed in police practice and successive changes in citizenship laws, and against the more subtle racism of the liberal Centre, which offers blacks the prospects of an illusory honorary British status at the price of shedding their own cultural identities and loyalties. The women's movement has challenged patriarchal definitions of citizenship, which subsume women under a male provider/protector (for example in welfare provision). At the same time, intertwined with the internal crisis, Britain's position in the world has steadily declined.

Thatcherism and the nation

As yet the Right has been more effective than the Left in addressing this sense of crisis. Thatcherism appeals, on both economic and political issues, by its emphasis on restoring simple, 'traditional' white anglo-saxon protestant virtues: the free market and self help, 'living within our means', respect for authority, the family, national pride and loyalty. Like all ideological appeals to restore vanished virtues, this is in fact the creation of something new; the mythologised Britain of Victorian entrepreneurs never really existed, and certainly can never be re-created. The Thatcherite appeal to nationhood contains a hysterical note, because it invokes a false unity in a deeply divided nation. Even parts of the establishment — including, one suspects in the armed forces, who are usually less jingoistic than armchair patriots —were disturbed by Thatcher's recent attempt to hi-jack the Church of England.[9] Thatcherism can resolve neither the economic problems associated with imperial decline, nor the ideological crisis of British nationhood. It would however be a mistake to underestimate the extent to which the Tories can paper over the cracks, perhaps claim the credit for some perceived economic 'improvement',[10] police the crisis and engineer the necessary degree of consensus in support of these pseudo-solutions.

The note of jingoistic hysteria over the Falklands, which understandably horrified and frightened many people on the Left, reflects the potential fragility as well as the actual strength of the new Right. To exploit

[6] *Ibid*

[7] T Nairn, 'Britain's Living Legacy', *Marxism Today* July 1982.

[8] See A. Gamble, *Britain in Decline* (1981) ch4.

[9] See K Leech, 'Is the Church of England Really Moving to the Left', *Marxism Today*, Oct. 1982, p16.

[10] Any such 'improvement' would of course be relative to the catastrophic decline, and correspondingly lowered expectations, of recent years; it may nevertheless be the *perception* of things 'getting better' that counts for a sufficient proportion of electors.

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the multiplying contradictions of Thatcherism the Left will need to build various forms of struggle into a new popular majority. An alternative vision of Britain as a nation can be a central reference-point for building alliances around the labour movement. This will not be easy. Thatcher's politics, despite a populist style, draw on the ideological traditions with which the British ruling class has protected its position over a long history — in particular, the identification of the nation with the establishment and the political Right. A new popular majority will have to break through these in-depth defences.

1945

There is a historical precedent for this, though not a precise one, nor one that can be mechanically reproduced in the 1980s. 1945 was perhaps the moment when the labour movement and the Left came closest to undermining their oponents' claim to speak for the higher interests of the nation as a whole. The crimes and errors of appeasement, then the popular politics of national unity during the war, to which the Communist Party made a significant contribution, discredited the image of the Conservatives as the party of the 'national interest'. To this day, socialists and communists of the war generation get particularly angry at Conservative claims to a political monopoly on patriotism. Even the national flag became for a time the property of the Left, as well as the Tories. The identification of ordinary people as the backbone of the national effort; popular initiatives in civil defence and voluntary services; the production drive in the factories; the opportunities for discussion and the expanding influence of radical ideas — all contributed to a democratic egalitarian atmosphere and demands for a better post-war society. Labour was the principal electoral expression of these aspirations. The Labour victory was not simply as the party of the organised working class, but as the political force to which a variety of strata and groups, many of them by tradition hostile to socialism, looked for leadership in post-war reconstruction.

The new majority against Thatcher will not be a simple re-run of this experience. Circumstances are quite different. Moreover the limitations of 1945 are indicated by the relative ease with which the Tories bounced back as the managers of the post-war social democratic consensus. 1945 does however suggest that the association of the Right with the 'national interest' and the political consensus defining that interest is not an inexorable law of nature. Any substantial political advance will involve some shift in the meaning of nationhood as popularly perceived. The struggle to defeat Thatcher must have such a shift as one of its essential parts.

But the defeat of Thatcher and the advent of a Labour government of a new type will not, in itself, reverse the three centuries or so of history from which dominant definitions of the nation have been composed. In the longer term, as the struggle for socialism develops, changing common sense views of the nation will be one guarantee of further political advance. The first step along this road is a majority against Thatcher, centred on the labour movement as the real alternative, and re-defining the interests of the nation around that alternative.

Signs of change

This re-definition cannot of course be made up in the abstract. Its elements are present in all the forms of popular struggle which have emerged in British society. These need to be given more coherent expression, linked together in a vision of the possible future. A new conception of nationhood will make sense and grip people's minds, in so far as it is associated with concrete prospects of a better future. The jingoistic hysteria we have witnessed over the Falklands is the

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morbid reflex of widespread cynicism and despair about the future; a more progressive and humane outlook will be the reflex of new hope for a credible way out of the crisis.

There are some positive signs that the Left is learning, from bitter experience, to think strategically about the building of broad alliances, to recognise the diversity of experiences and issues that can contribute to this, and to address these issues with programmes that offer some immediate prospect of change, rather than the abstract 'instant socialism' still on offer in some quarters. The discussion around the strategy of the British and other European Communist Parties is one significant influence in this respect, as is the new 'Bennite' Left in the Labour Party. Both these have in common an attempt to map out the middle ground between where we are and the vision of a socialist future.

photo Laurie Sparham/Network

To cross this middle ground demands a creative political response to all the problems of imperial decline. Recent years have seen a range of new movements and struggles which have renewed, but also in important respects challenged the politics of the Left. The Left has developed to a greater extent than before, concrete policies like the alternative economic strategy (AES) or the new European perspective of the peace movement. But these movements and policies remain fragmented and sectionalised. The project of re-defining the essential interests of the nation around the working class could provide a missing centre for the political programmes of the Left.

The English problem

The absence of that centre is damaging, in two immediate and obvious rspects. First, the response of the labour movement to the national question has on the whole — with very important exceptions including the Communist Party — been incoherent and opportunistic. This is obviously true of the last Labour government, but it also applies to the broader movement, including many who belong to the Left. There is little awareness of the issues outside Scotland and Wales themselves, and no mobilisation around them. To win the labour movement throughout the UK to understand and actively champion national rights for Scotland and Wales is a central political task.

The incoherent response of the movement to date is no doubt in part a reflection of the deep ambiguities and dilemmas of British/English national identity. It is difficult to define a coherent approach to Scottish or Welsh national feeling without some clearer idea of what Britain as a nation is, and what we would wish it to become. The Left will have to confront the issue of creating a 'British' identity that is not simply the expression of a centralist, English-based imperial state. If Britain, as a unitary nation-state, is to exist — and there are strong socialist grounds for wishing it to exist in some form — it can only be in the context of radical changes in the institutional form of the relationship between its component nations and peoples.

Secondly, the AES and the peace movement's policies for European disarmament both have important implications for Britain's future position in the world. To implement these policies will require a clearer view of how that position will change. This can start from the simple fact, which the Left must surely welcome, that Britain can no longer pretend to be the banker, policeman or moral missionary of the world, but is now one medium European country among several, to which more modest, but also perhaps more constructive ambitions are appropriate. Britain's location in western Europe is a necessary component in any realistic Left strategy; the way to socialism will be opened in the context of a European approach —which is of course not at all the same thing as an EEC approach — to peace, disarmament, international cooperation for economic and cultural progress. If we are to offer the British people a credible alternative some attention will have to be given to the concrete forms in which this might develop.

A long haul

A more coherent view of Britain as a nation, its composition, and the essential common interests of its peoples could the fill a damaging gap in the politics of the Left. This is not simply a matter of short term political programmes, but of a wider struggle for political and cultural leadership in society. This will be a protracted 'long haul', developing over many changes of government and swings in popular opinion, and no doubt suffering set-backs as well as making advances. The Left cannot expect to undo three centuries or so of history quickly or easily. The very strong residues of empire and chauvinism in popular common sense will make our relationship to British nationhood an uneasy one for the foreseeable future.

Yet there are more positive elements in popular tradition — above all, the deep attachment to democratic norms and practices. Linked to new forms of democratic struggle, these traditions can set in motion a dynamic change in popular conceptions. This change will be towards a more open, democratic view of the nation and its components, one that can encompass new identities and aspirations in different sections of the people. The nation will thus appear in a more open-ended way, as historically produced and in process of change. Its traditions are to be constructed and reconstructed in each generation, rather than a sacred patrimony to be handed on intact.

Such a conception of the British nation is perhaps remote from the actual Britian of Thatcher's war in the South Atlantic, the new cold war, and repression in the inner cities and Ireland. But it may nevertheless be useful, given that the nation-state will be a significant arena of political struggle for the foreseeable future, to consider what kind of popular view of the nation would correspond to socialist advance. And there are many positive developments which point towards such a conception. If we can finally grasp the nettle of British nationhood, we can begin to move along that road.

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The Tories have embarked on a new training strategy: how should the Left respond?

John Fairley

The Great Training Robbery

photo: John Sturrock/Network

Once again a Tory government is initiating a major reform of the training system. This reform is complex and will affect youth training, the statutory training system, industrial relations and the education services. So far only a few of the government's proposals have been widely discussed and no radical alternative has been developed.

This article focusses on the two main elements in Tory training policy, namely the extension of youth training through the New Training Initiative, and the simultaneous destruction of the statutory training system. The last section of the article suggests certain themes on which the Left could respond to Tory proposals and go beyond these to develop its own training strategy.

Youth Unemployment and YOP

Unemployment has risen sharply under the Tories, largely as a consequence of their economic policies. In particular youth unemployment has shot up and continues to worsen, with the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) forecasting that 57% of 16 year-olds and 48% of 17 year-olds will be unemployed by September 1984.

Only the Tory 'wets' have been greatly concerned about this massive job shortage. However, there seems to have been a broader awareness amongst Conservatives that, potentially, unemployment could prove to be the achilles heel in their strategy. At any rate the Tories have been anxious to be seen 'to be doing something' for the young unemployed. This aspect of Tory policy is central to their reform of training and shows a surprising degree of continuity with the actions of the previous Labour government.

In 1978, following an influential official report on youth unemployment and persistent TUC pressure, Labour introduced the Youth Opportunities Programme (YOP). YOP was seen then as a short term programme offering various kinds of work preparation to unemployed youngsters to help get them into proper jobs. Since taking office the Tories have expanded YOP as youth unemployment has risen and used it more directly as a social policy response in areas marked by youth riots and unrest. YOP has grown from 162,000 entrants in 1978—79 to a massive 550,000 in 1981—82. The programme has become a central and fairly permanent plank in youth and labour market policy. Along with other, smaller 'special programmes' for the unemployed, YOP has been a privileged area of growth in public expenditure, even under the Thatcher government.

Unemployment programmes have never been fully assessed by the labour movement. In the early days of YOP, doubts and criticisms were overshadowed by the success of the programme in getting 70—80% of its young people into jobs. However, as YOP has grown and the recession has deepened, these 'job placement rates' have fallen sharply (to 20% in some areas) and the old criticisms have re-emerged. A number of trade unions have recently threatened to

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withdraw cooperation unless YOP is substantially improved.

YOP is criticised as being 'cheap labour', and certainly the low allowances paid condemn many youngsters to poverty and/or dependence on their families. Generally, the quality of training and work experience is low, and many young people find their 'opportunities' to be little more than boring, dirty, repetitive work. While MSC and educationalists often describe YOP as a 'training programme' most young people get very little training. Young people on YOP find themselves unprotected by health and safety legislation. Not surprisingly many young people are unwilling to put up with these conditions when there is no prospect of a job afterwards, and YOP places are reported to be increasingly 'hard to fill' in the most depressed parts of the country.

In addition, trade unions have become increasingly critical of YOP following official admission that employers have used the scheme to 'substitute' for normal jobs. About two thirds of YOP consists of so-called WEEP, ie, Work Experience on Employers Premises. On the admission of employers about one third of WEEP displaces real jobs and, given the complete lack of effective monitoring within YOP, the real level of abuse may be much higher than employers are willing to admit.

These critcisms have resulted in widespread dissatisfaction with YOP but so far no radical alternatives have been developed by the critics. While the labour movement has this policy weakness, the Tories seem very alive to the strategic value of YOP and intend to make the programme the basis of the whole youth training system. From the Government's perspective, YOP has many endearing features: it demonstrates to employers and youth the level of earnings which the Tories believe to be appropriate for young people. YOP carries with it the strong implication that the causes of youth unemployment are to be found in the unrealistic expectations of young people and/or their unsuitability for employment rather than in Government economic policy. The programme lowers youth aspirations, undermines paid employment, and weakens trade union influence over training. In addition, it removes large numbers of young people from the unemployment figures, and allows the Government to claim to be helping youth.

The New Training Initiative

In 1981, the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) issued a consultative document on training reform, the New Training Initiative (NTI). NTI proposed the modernisation of skill training, giving all young people either full time education or work experience and training, and improving the training available to adults. The proposals were so general that everyone found it possible to agree with them. Many on the Left responded warmly to NTI because they mistakenly saw its author, the MSC, as an independent critic of the Government. In fact, although TUC and CBI are represented within it, the MSC is a part of the Employment Department and responsible to Norman Tebbit who personally chooses its senior staff. The Tory government quickly realised the opportunities within NTI for making the strategic potential of YOP a reality, and at the same time carrying along its critics through the ambiguous position of MSC. In December, the Tories issued a White Paper on NTI[1], emphasising the importance of developing youth provision, and gave the MSC the go-ahead to set up a high-level Youth Task Group to work out the details of the new youth scheme.

The reforms outlined in the White Paper have had very little critical discussion. This reflects not only the Left's failure to come to terms with training issues, but also a high level of tactical skill on the part of Norman Tebbit. His White Paper contained two patently unworkable suggestions which provoked widespread controversy and diverted attention from the more substantial training issues. It was initially suggested that young people be compelled to take part in the scheme and that the level of allowances should be lower than those paid under YOP. These suggestions were opposed by nearly everybody (including employers). The subsequent report of the Youth Task Group [2] led to the restoration of YOP-level allowances and the decision to defer judgement on whether the scheme should be coercive or not. These changes enabled the Right in the labour movement to claim a famous victory for the labour movement and the MSC over the Employment Secretary although all that had been 'won' was the restoration of unsatisfactory YOP terms and conditions.

> the notion of half a million young people frantically chasing City and Guilds qualifications is completely fanciful

The TUC, CBI, MSC and Government have now all given their uncritical support to the Task Group report. This proposes that unemployed 16 year-olds be given 12-month 'traineeships', 3 months of which are to be spent in appropriate off-the-job education and training. These traineeships are to be based on the experience of the higher levels of provision found under YOP and the low-level training given to some young workers under a smaller scheme known as UVP (Unified Vocational Preparation).

Employers will get grants of about £1850 per trainee, out of which the youth allowance of about £1450 must be paid. This leaves the princely sum of about £400 to pay for training and means that the general level of training provision is likely to be very low. In a recent Commons debate one Labour MP argued that the new youth scheme would give only 'pre-vocational' training.[3]

Employers are only supposed to receive grants when trainees are 'additional' to normal youth recruitment. In practice, additionality is a very difficult thing to measure, especially when demand for labour is falling. In any case, the new scheme is like YOP in that no resources are available to ensure proper monitoring. Given the extent to which employers are pressured by recession to reduce labour costs, it is not inconceivable that the new youth scheme could lead to the displacement of all school-leaver employment, including apprentices, by state-financed 'trainees'. If additionality is, by some miracle, adhered to then employers may simply refuse to take part in the scheme. The level of grant is simply not enough to cover the cost of the extra trainees and, in times of recession, employers will not shoulder the costs of training which they feel to be unnecessary from an economic point of view. Like YOP, the new youth scheme is wide open to abuse by employers. The MSC wants the rapid creation by employers of about 300,000 places. However as NTI stands, the incentives for employers to participate are not very great. The rapid creation of training places on the scale required by MSC seems unlikely unless employers are permitted to make greater savings on labour costs by using MSC paid youth trainees to substitute for real jobs and apprenticeships. Senior MSC staff are reported to be urging employers to do just that.[4]

The new scheme is planned to be in full flow in 1983—84 when it will cater for 460,000 young people at a cost of £1.1bn. The Task Group hopes that 300,000 of

[1] Cmnd 8455, A New Training Initiative, HMSO December 1981.
[2] MSC April 1982, Report of the Youth Task Group.
[3] House of Commons Hansard, 20th July 1982.
[4] Times Educational Supplement, 6th August 1982.

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photo Ann Silvertear

these young people will be placed with private and public sector employers. The MSC will provide the remainder with a second-best form of provision which may not even offer decent work experience, let alone training. The problem here is that there are parts of the country where firms have been so badly hit by recession that they may be unable to bite on the carrot which MSC is offering.

In the Toxteths, Brixtons and Handsworths, second-best provision may be the norm for young people. Indeed by choosing an employer-based, work-focussed scheme rather than a proper training and education programme, the MSC and the Tories may have ensured that existing regional and local inequalities are worsened.

Within the scheme trade unions will retain the right to recruit and negotiate for youth. However, in recession it is difficult to see unions acting effectively for temporary youth trainees. With MSC controlling the level of allowances and the content of 'trainee contracts', young people may not see much purpose in joining trade unions, unless of course the trade union movement can develop some new bases on which to appeal to youth.

Getting it wrong

Despite the fact that all the deficiences of YOP seem to be writ large in this scheme, many in the labour movement and some on the Left have hailed it as a great advance. There are a number of reasons for this, all of them questionable.

First, it is frequently pointed out that in Britain, training (like education) is highly elitist, benefitting only the better qualified school leaver. It is pointed out that countries like West Germany train a higher proportion of their youth than we do. The Tories have made considerable mileage from the egalitarian appearances of their new scheme. However, as we have seen, the new scheme is not designed to improve or monitor the quality of training. While it is impossible to make international comparisons of training quality, it is important to remember that apprenticeship remains the central form of youth training in West Germany. By contrast, in Britain a very modern, flexible apprenticeship system is currently being sacrificed on the altar of YOP.

Second, the Left has long wanted comprehensive youth provision with the planned integration of training and related educat ion. Despite superficial appearances, current proposals offer neither of these things. Young people in full time education are not affected by the scheme and will remain relatively privileged. Within the scheme young people will encounter all manner of types and levels of provision, determined not by informed planning but rather by the accident of where they live and the short term preferences of employers.

Third, at the end of their 'traineeship' young people will receive a certificate documenting their achievements. Many educationalists have welcomed the step towards qualification, but again the question of quality is rarely discussed. Certainly, the notion of half a million young people frantically chasing City and Guilds qualifications is completely fanciful. Rather most young people seem likely to get certificates of 'competence' in low level work experience and in life and social skills. The experience in Europe of such vocational certificates seems to be that employers don't rate them too highly when recruiting workers.

Any lingering doubts that perhaps Norman Tebbit does want to see all young people acquiring high level skills and qualifications can easily be laid to rest. After all, as the TUC has argued[5], such objectives are hardly consistent with the irreparable damage which is currently being inflicted on Britain's skill training system.

The attack on training

This second strand of Tory policy is much simpler. It involves a straightforward attack on Britain's statutory training organisations: the Industrial Training Boards (ITBs) which up to this year were responsible for planning, modernising and monitoring the training of roughly 50% of Britain's workforce. The attack on the ITBs has been overshadowed by the publicity surrounding the related cuts to further education and the technological universities. The growth of MSC unemployment programmes and the development of NTI have also concealed this attack on training organisations.

The ITBs were set up under a Tory Act of 1964 because employers had proved themselves as reluctant to invest in skill as to invest in plant and machinery. The Boards were given substantial powers to make employers raise the quantity and improve the quality of their training. In the major industries ITBs were fairly successful. In engineering, for instance, the duration of apprenticeship was reduced from 5—6 to 3½—4 years and a modern, modular, standards-based training system was introduced in 1968, to replace the old fashioned 'time serving' approach.

However, the Tory Right always opposed this interventionist training policy and MPs like Enoch Powell continually sniped at the ITBs. In 1973 this faction within the Tory Party pushed the Heath government into substantially reducing ITB powers. At that time it was argued that ITBs had so successfully changed employers' attitudes to training that they had made themselves redundant. Now that the Tory Right is in government on its own terms, this argument has persisted but new ones have also come to the fore. ITBs are charged with being ineffective bureaucracies: Tories point to the decline in training which followed the economic stagnation and deindustrialisation of the 1970s and blame that decline on ITBs. In reality, the Heath Act did not leave ITBs sufficient clout to overcome employers' reluctance to train. Tories have argued that the Boards have perpetuated old-fashioned training systems which are inappropriate to the needs of modern technology. In fact, as we have noted, ITBs were fairly effective in modernising training. The weakness of the Left on training policy has helped permit the Tories to have it all ways at once. Now all but seven of the ITBs have been closed.

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Boards remain in clothing, construction, engineering, road transport, hotel and catering, plastics and offshore oil, but even these face an uncertain future with reduced funding.

The major reason that ITBs incurred Tory wrath is probably the degree of influence which their organisation and activities gave to trade unions. At national level, trade unions and employers were equally represented on ITBs and unions had real influence over policy development. The current replacement of ITBs by employers' training organisations is simply another indication of the monetarist desire to give employers control over the working of labour markets. At plant level, the protection of high-level, modern skills by ITBs gave workers some degree of power and influence in the labour process. While it would be wrong to exaggerate this influence, the Tories seem convinced of its existence and determined to undermine it. Since the influential 'Think Tank' published its report in training[6] in 1980, the Tories have consistently attacked the very concepts of skill and apprenticeship as outmoded 'restrictive practices' which must be removed.

Trade unions have opposed the closure of ITBs but, with the exception of a grass-roots campaign by branches of the white collar unions APEX and ASTMS, the job of opposing the Tories has been left to the Labour opposition and to the TUC members of the MSC. Within Parliament the weakness of the Labour Left has been demonstrated by its lack of influence in this campaign. MPs normally associated with the Right and Centre of the Labour Party have skilfully led the opposition to ITB closures.

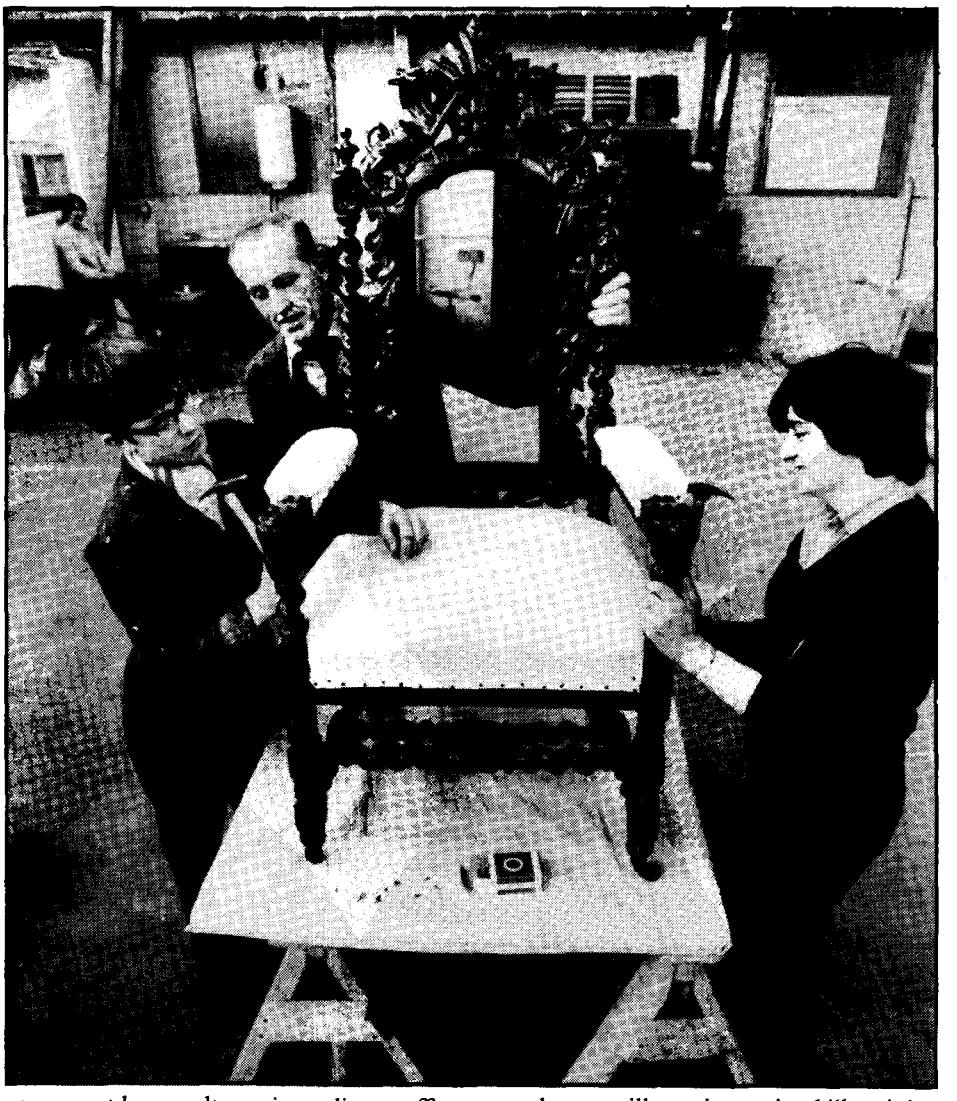

photo John Sturrock/Network

Towards a Left training strategy

The Left needs both to respond to Tory plans and develop its own long term strategic view of training if this policy area is ever to be freed from right wing domination. The two tasks are of course closely linked: by responding to NTI the Left can begin to raise questions at the heart of an alternative strategy for training.

The most immediate question which the Left needs to resolve is whether or not the Labour movement should participate in NTI. Many on the Left will build a strong case for abstention based on the negative features of the youth training proposals and the closure of ITBs. However, there seem to be two obvious dangers in abstention: First, the Tories and the media will seek to portray the labour movement as selfishly opposed to the needs of youth, particularly when the movement has no alternative policy to offer. The abyss separating youth and the labour movement will be widened. Second, the Tories will be given a free hand to close the remaining seven ITBs and pass the whole of training policy over to employers on their own terms. In times of recession employers will tend to do the minimum possible training to the cheapest possible standards.

The problem then is how to participate in NTI without merely conniving in the oppression and exploitation of young people. This may be possible, but only on the basis of a thorough critique of NTI and the development of an alternative training strategy. These urgent tasks seem likely to involve discussion of the following themes.

1 Training and the alternative economic strategy

The British economy needs to be re-industrialised on the basis of advanced technology. Recent research suggest that this is likely to require a workforce highly trained in advanced and traditional skills[7]. British experience suggests that left to themselves employers will not invest in skill training. An early return to a statutory training system is necessary to secure adequate levels of high quality training. The seven remaining ITBs could be the basis of a new statutory training system, but it may be that the depth of Britain's crisis requires stronger forms of intervention. Training policy needs to be closely linked to full employment, ie, training must be linked up to a programme for the creation of real jobs. At the same time the argument that training is an appropriate and adequate response to unemployment must be countered.

2 NTI and high quality training

We have argued above that the major need within the new youth scheme is for the

[5] TUC, March 1981, Industrial Training Consultative Document.

[6] Central Policy Review Staff, 1980, Education, Training and Industrial Performance, HMSO.

[7] MSC, July 1982, New Technology and Employment.

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setting and monitoring of proper training standards. High quality training is vital if the scheme is to be useful to and valued by young people. The remaining seven ITBs can ensure high quality training in about 30% of the economy, if they are given the necessary resources. In addition the ITBs can carry on ensuring good quality training for those groups not catered for by the new scheme, ie, the entire working population over the age of 17 who are offered very little within NTI as currently developed. ITBs can play a role in developing adult training and re-training, if the Government can be pressed to make adequate resources available. Outside the ITB sector, trade unions must take on the role of monitoring training quality within NTI. Workplace training representatives will be necessary, but unions will also need the right to inspect schemes in unorganised workplaces. Trade unions and young people may find some new common ground in concern over the quality of training.

3 Equal opportunities and NTI

It is now widely recognised that women and ethnic minorities are greatly discriminated against in training provision. While they welcomed the three broad objectives of NTI, both the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality felt that the MSC proposals did not properly grasp the nettle of equal opportunities. The proposals have also been subject to independent critique by feminists[8]. However, there would seem to be no reason why the receipt of MSC or ITB grants by employers should not be made conditional upon the demonstration of some commitment to equal opportunities. Movement towards equal opportunities should be closely monitored with women and ethnic minorities represented on every agency with an important role in delivering NTI.

> the Tories and the media will seek to portray the labour movement as selfishly opposed to the needs of youth

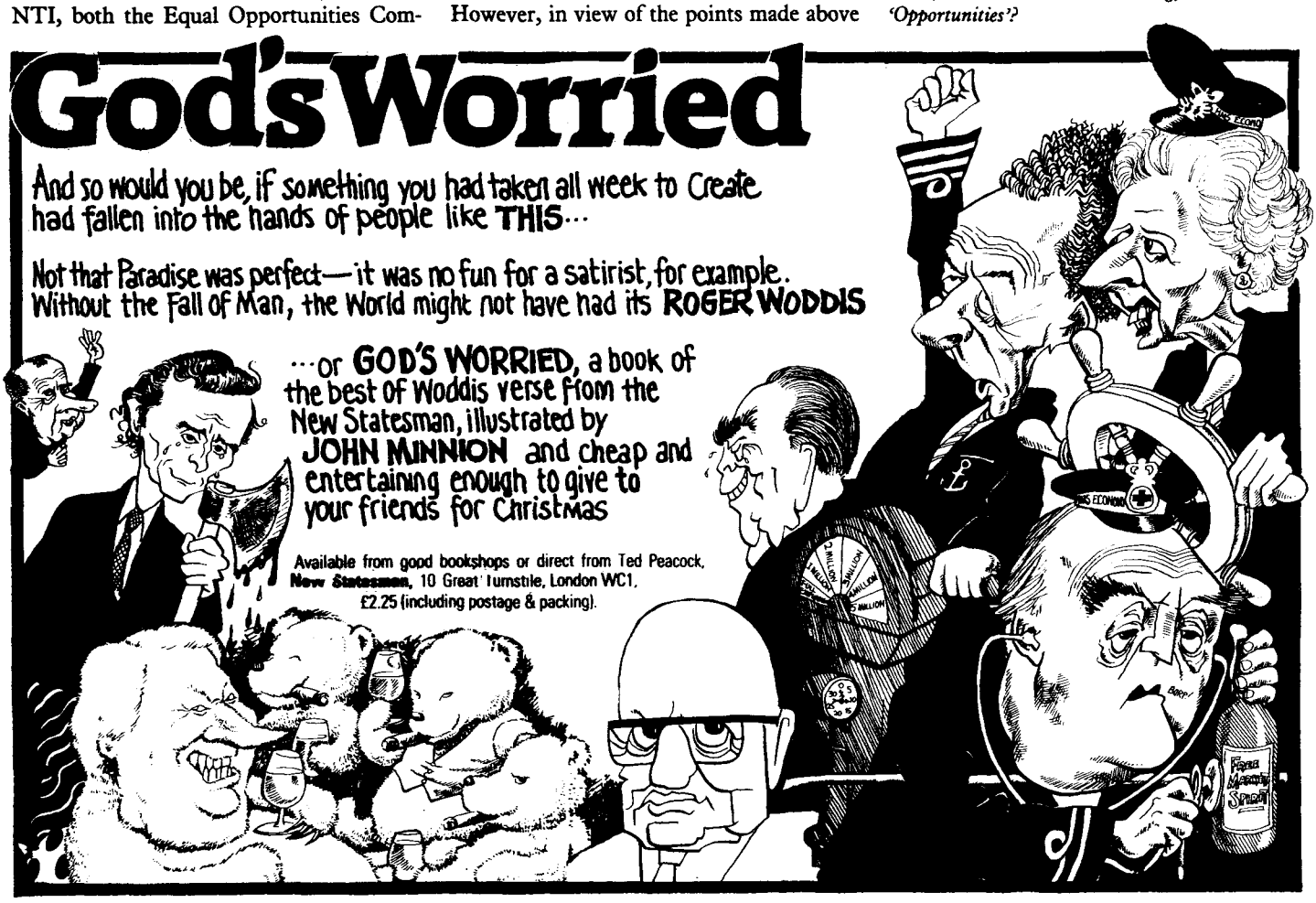
4 The The Delivery of NTI

In yet another consultative document, MSC has proposed that the new youth scheme be delivered through a system of Area Manpower Boards (AMBs) which will be based on groups of (or individual) local education authority areas. These AMBs are planned to be small agencies of an executive nature. However, in view of the points made above concerning training quality and democracy within the programme, it seems vital that AMBs have young people, women, ethnic minorities and ITBs represented on them to complement the narrow tripartism which MSC favours. In addition, trade union and community representatives need to be able to draw on some central advice unit and discuss experiences and future plans at annual conferences. Otherwise they are likely to become lost in the complex day-to-day problems of running a large scale youth programe.

Conclusion

The Left needs to respond to Tory training proposals. By addressing the broad range of issues involved in training policy the Left can decide on the price of labour movement participation in NTI. It can begin to formulate a critique of NTI and alternatives perhaps more attractive to young people. Unless this is done, the Tories will use youth schemes to further isolate the labour movement and young people will be trained passively to accept poverty and unemployment. □

[8] Lewisham Women's Employment Project, 1982, *Women and Training, Who Said 'Opportunities'?*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Discussion

The Unions: caught on the ebb tide

Dave Priscott

The challenge of Tebbit's Law looms so large that it may overshadow some longer term problems for the trade union movement; caused not only by economic crisis and governmental hostility, but also by deep and in some cases irreversible economic, technical and social changes.

In taking up one aspect of those problems — the changing location of industry — Tony Lane's article makes an interesting contribution to the wider discussion that is needed.

But we need something more substantial, something which would analyse changes in the structure and location of our industries and in the composition of the working class and which would suggest changes needed in trade union organisation to meet the new circumstances. Particularly we need a fresh look at how to strengthen trade union democracy. The strategy of left unity has brought substantial gains; but the trade union movement is more than the simple total of left plus right wings, and we must not get into a position where the struggle for short term tactical gains for the Left gets in the way of a principled look at what, in the long term, the whole movement needs. Communists have a proud tradition of pioneering proposals aimed at strengthening trade union democracy. It is time for a new creative initiative aimed at ensuring the greater involvement of all trade unionists — particularly women and youth — in the work of the movement.

My aim here is much less ambitious. It is to take up and develop a few aspects of Tony's article which I felt were less than satisfactory.

Incomes policy or wages policy?

I was surprised by Tony's approving quote from Woodcock. Tony obviously thinks that Woodcock was expressing some profound new insight into problems of the labour movement. I think he was just indulging in the long-established practice of dressing up the hackneyed policies of class collaboration in purple prose. His essential meaning was no different from that of Sid Weighell's 'pig-trough' speech.

Communists can be proud of their consistent fight against all forms of incomes policy that have been designed to hold back the wages struggle. But it is not enough to combat incomes policies; we need also to to examine in a positive way problems of developing the wages struggle.

As long as we live in a society in which labour power is a commodity and in which most people can only live by selling that commodity, struggles over the price of that commodity will always be the main foundation stone on which trade union organisation is built (though not, of course, the whole edifice!).

Wages are not the only thing that matter to a worker; hours, conditions, job satisfaction, the comradeship of fellow workers, all play a part. But the primary reason for going to work is to get money. Some say that for women hours are more important than wages, but this is surely a confusion between ends and means. Women go to work to get money, and rightly so — there's not much chance for women's liberation if they can't even get the limited degree of economic independence afforded by a pay packet! But the nature of our society, the unequal division of responsibilities within the family, the lack of child care facilities, all make it difficult for many women to conform to what is generally regarded as the 'normal' working week. Hence the great importance to women of the question of hours of work. But it is important as a means to an end; the end itself is still the pay packet.

Not spontaneous

The wages struggle does not spontaneously generate socialist ideas amongst the working class — if it did, our working class would be the most socialist in the world, for we have been engaged in wages struggles longer than anyone. Nevertheless, for many workers, the wages struggle does provide their first introduction to trade union organisation; and for some this can be a step towards making contact with wider ideas of class solidarity, and sometimes to making contact with socialist ideas.

Incomes policy means wage restraint, and wage restraint has nothing to do with solving Britain's problems. On the contrary; higher wages, as part of a wider package of measures, are an essential ingredient in solving our economic problems. Incomes policy (wage restraint) would make Britain's problems worse.

Does this hold good for all foreseeable future circumstances?

Communists envisage a transition to socialism in Britain via a left government, or a succession of left governments, with the underlying driving force being the mass struggles of a working class growing in political consciousness. Could we say that at no time in that transition, and at no time during the construction of socialism, would wage increases pose any problem for a left or socialist government? I would not like to commit myself to such a position!

Britain may be able to advance to socialism without armed intervention or civil war, but it can hardly escape the economic pressures of the capitalist world — not to mention the mistakes that may be made on the road to socialism! There have been times when the Soviet working class has had to tighten its belts for the salvation of the revolution, and recent experience in Eastern

photo Mike Abrahams/Network

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Europe does not encourage the view that the rise in real wages is bound to be uninterrupted. It would be realistic to expect that a left or socialist government in Britain might well face temporary difficulties, due to imperialist pressures or to other causes, that could be greatly exacerbated if workers fought for higher wages.

Such circumstances would not justify anything resembling what we mean today by 'incomes policy'. That would be an attempt to solve the problem from above, by bureaucratic and administrative means; it would run counter to our view that trade unions should be independent of the state under socialism as under capitalism. Yet the problem remains and it could no more be left to 'spontaneity' to solve it than could any other serious problem. Its solution could only be through a party, rooted in the working class, prepared to fight to win workers to understand that the advance to socialism, and the construction of socialism, may sometimes require sacrifices.

Priorities of the movement

To come back from the future to the present, and consider some lessons from the health workers' dispute. No 'incomes policy' would give the health workers what they want. But neither will they win their demands simply through collective bargaining within the confines of their own industry. Whatever they win will be through collective bargaining in conditions of general public sympathy expressed in its most effective form by widespread trade union solidarity action.

But low pay in the health service is not the only problem that ought to be of concern to the whole movement. The prevalence of low pay in too many occupations, the particular problem of the wages, hours and conditions of women workers, are just a few of the problems that can only be tackled by the movement as a whole.

It used to be argued that if the 'big battalions' made a breakthrough in the wages struggle, all the weaker sections would make consequential gains. That may have been true in boom conditions but I doubt its viability today.

What the trade union movement needs, therefore, is not an incomes policy worked out with the government, but a wages policy worked out by the movement itself to advance the interests of the whole working class. By this I do not mean that the TUC General Council should override the collective bargaining functions of each separate union or group of unions. What I mean is, that the normal collective bargaining process should be supplemented by agreed combined efforts by the movement as a whole to tackle certain outstanding general problems. Many of the policies are actually there, on paper, in resolutions passed; what is needed is the leadership, and the collective will, to fight for them.

Divisions in the working class

Marxists have always recognised that perks of one sort or another have a corrupting influence on some workers, and can affect whole sections of the movement. Read Marx and Engels on the roots of opportunism in the British labour movement; read the contributions to an earlier *Marxism Today* discussion on trade union problems, back in 1958. It was not wrong to refer to this problem in the past, and still today we only discredit ourselves with workers if we try to sweep it under the carpet.

However, some of Tony's examples were ill-chosen; he appears not to recognise that the problem is more serious at top levels than amongst shop stewards; and above all his totally one-sided presentation is quite unacceptable. To describe what is happening as 'the creation of a new working class elite' is so absurd that I am happy to leave it to others to shy their missiles at the Aunt Sally Tony has made of himself.

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There are much more serious problems that deserve more serious consideration. There is the problem that policies adopted by the movement's activists have yet to be won amongst the rank and file. The recent Trades Union Congress took some fine decisions, but how right Mick McGahey was to point out how much work has yet to be done to win wholehearted support for them in the workplaces *(Morning Star,* Sept 13). However, this is a problem I have written about before; what I want now to do is to look, not at an imaginary shop steward elite, but at a very real problem of division in the working class.

Over 100 years ago Marx and Engels pointed to the gap between the 'aristocracy of labour' and the depressed and downtrodden unorganised sections of the working class. That particular division of the working class no longer exists in that form. But there is a gap today between the bulk of the organised and full-time employed section of the working class on the one hand, and the great and growing mass of unemployed on the other — especially young unemployed, especially black unemployed — people with no work, no hope of work, no experience of the labour movement. It is a gap as wide as any that existed in Marx's day and it ought to frighten us.

The gap between the old aristocracy of labour and the more depressed masses did not close spontaneously. It was bridged by politically conscious workers, many of them Marxists, many of them from trade unions that were strongholds of the aristocracy of labour. Their political convictions led them to help the unorganised to organise and struggle. Tom Mann is rightly honoured and remembered as much for his role in the dock strike as for his record in the ASE.

The comrades who today participate in the Peoples Marches for Jobs, who are active in the unemployment centres and amongst the young black and white people of the inner cities — these comrades are beginning in a small way to do what Tom Mann and his comrades did in their day. We need many more of them. What is at stake is the unity of our class.

The Unions: caught on the ebb tide

Pete Carter

I would like to make a brief contribution to a discussion around Tony Lane's article on trade unions in September's *Marxism Today.* First let me say I found it an interesting, thought provoking article and I have had several valuable discussions about it with other trade union officers.

Their reaction, as well as my own, was to welcome Lane's contribution, and whilst all had criticisms they felt its publication was timely, in spite of knowing that what was being said would not be welcome by all. What I found particularly valuable was Lane's investigation of the long term trends in the British economy and the impact this has had on trade unionism. We need more detailed discussion on this.

As a trade union official in construction, a large part of my experience has been to deal with small units of workers at hundreds of points of production. Construction is, because of this, a most difficult industry to organise and consequently it is riddled with anti union feelings expressed mainly through the lump system of employment (ie, even smaller units of workers operating in gangs). Conversely I have experienced a static workforce such as direct labour organisations in major cities where potential for organisation and strong trade unionism has been far greater.

Lane's article could have provided more hard information but the trend he points out seems right. All over the Midlands there are factory units built on green field sites with easy access to motorways and isolated from other factories and workers.

The move away from big inner city plants and factories has happened in many towns. There has been some discussion on the left about inner city decline and decay but this has concentrated on the social consequences eg, worse housing or the impact of deindustrialisation on these areas themselves. What has been largely missing is an analysis of the effect of this on urban trade unionism, on how the movement has changed. Lane gives us some important clues here.

However the growth of white collar and public sector trade unionism is largely missing from his picture. This represents one of the labour movement's important gains over the last two decades and needs to be integrated into Lane's argument. Of course the influx of these sections has altered the character of the movement, a glance at many trades councils shows that. Health service workers, teachers, local government staff generally lack the cohesion and clout often associated with industrial workers; but they are crucial to the movement and its ability to defend and extend social provision. How can co-operation develop with the older sections of the movement?

Trade union practices

Clearly the impact of Thatcher's monetarism has been to accelerate and worsen these long term trends. The effect of this government's deliberate creation of mass unemployment must not be underestimated. It is both laying waste to many old industrial areas and using unemployment as a weapon of fear to paralyse trade unionists.

In turn the inability of the trade unions to stop this onslaught on members' jobs, wages and working conditions has led to a questioning among some of the effectiveness of trade unionism. Countering this view is made more difficult by some of the dubious practices that do occur in some quarters of our movement.

Lane's statement of the problem was too generalised, but in no way was it a slander on the movement. He was raising a serious question for us. Those who doubt this should read what Harry Pollitt wrote in this journal 24 years ago:

> 'Especially is it on the job that the vital question of class unity can best be understood, explained and acted upon. It is in this school of factory experience that the new trade union leaders can be educated, tried and brought forward. Not in the idea of being able to run capitalism more efficiently than the capitalists do themselves, but to fight capitalism, defend the position of the workers and be able to ensure the constructive role of the trade unions under socialism.
>
> One of the tragedies of trade union life and experience, because of the absence of such an outlook, is that many leaders forget the class which elected or appointed them, and thereby become easy prey to the wiles of capitalists, parsons and priests.
>
> To achieve such changes in outlook and organisation in the factories calls for great personal and collective effort on the part of all trade unionists. It needs greater attention to principles and less seeking of official jobs. Many corns will have to be trodden on, many prejudices overcome, sectionalism abolished and a re-dedication to the age-old trade union slogan of "United We Stand; Divided We Fall." ' (Whither Trade Unionism? *Marxism Today,* August 1958).

In the following discussion former sheetmetal workers leader Bill Warman wrote:

> '. . . There is a growing cynicism to the trade union movement and to many of its leaders, a

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lack of faith and confidence which is widespread . . .

Harry Pollitt, in opening the discussion on the trade union movement, made a call for the return of the pioneer spirit of the olden days. This, I believe, is absolutely necessary, but in doing so we have to combat certain habits and customs which have grown up inside the movement. Nobody should be asked, if at all possible, to suffer economic hardship as the result of his activities, though many do. There is, however, a tendency growing in the trade union movement today whereby many of its leaders at all levels are reluctant to do a single job unless they are paid for doing it. A great deal of time is spent at union conferences in discussing the question of payment for both major and minor offices in the trade union movement and there is a danger that the plums of office rather than the principles of the class struggle can become the main factor. (*Marxism Today* November 1958).

This may in some respects have been a somewhat harder view than Lane's, but today's sophisticated industrial relations managers and personnel teams are always trying to buy off lay officers and full time officials. Firms do send union officials a bottle of spirit at Christmas. The whole Left needs to discuss this problem responsibly.

Closed shop

An aspect Lane does not raise concerns the perks of office. Many unions do make favourable provisions for their officers and it expresses itself in many ways. This also needs to be discussed, as the plums of office and the perks of the job do take officials from their base and can easily alienate them from their members. It is true that unions have changed over the years, but what Bill Warman wrote about sharply in 1958 still goes on today. That aspect has not changed and it is essential that it does.

Lane's points about the closed shop are worthy of consideration. I know that it is a very difficult area for trade unionists. I find it difficult to raise doubts, especially as one of the current government attacks on the unions is to outlaw it. But there is some truth in the view that the closed shop has not altogether helped in developing the consciousness of trade union members. I do not argue against the closed shop, but much more against the way it has tended to operate over the years. It has been so easy to confront workers with a 'join or else' attitude, but what this does is to take away the need for argument, justification, and for the principles on which the movement was founded.

Added to this, once a person joins by and large they remain a card paying member. There seems to be little mechanism for involvement of members in the life and activities of the union. It has been argued that the closed shop is partly responsible for the lack of fight from members in defence of their union.

A new vision

Clearly the impact of the long term structural changes on which Lane concentrates and the devastating impact of Thatcherism and unemployment must force a big re-think in our movement. It is no good burying heads in the sand or hoping nostalgically for the good old days to return.

Full employment can never return as in the era of Macmillan's 'You've never had it so good' days. It is not just a question of capitalism's drive for profits, but increasingly it is able to create an abundance of goods in many areas which now begs the question for the reorganisation of our society.

For the future we have to develop our alternative economic policies. We still don't consider enough genuine questions raised by the energy crisis and the environmental movement, nor do we talk enough about socially useful and creative work, nor do we integrate the needs of women and ethnic minorities into our programmes. We tend to put too much emphasis on science and technology — discovering machines to do the job — and don't fully recognize the danger inherent in removing people from their relationship with nature through their tools and creative work. There is a need in the alternative economic strategy to develop argumentation for more labour intensive activity.

We also have to consider additional forms of union organisation and struggle. Here Lane's points on the role and needs of combine committees are especially valuable.

We also must discuss how to increase unity in the public sector and how the tremendous solidarity shown in the health workers dispute can become a common hallmark of our trade union movement. And how can the breadth, imagination and scope of the 1981 Peoples March for Jobs, where the labour movement led and encouraged a real broad alliance of forces on the unemployment issue, become the norm. More initiatives like this on unemployment are needed and the possibility of a major TUC/CND initiative against cruise and Trident in the autumn of 83 could be decisive. It is these qualities that the labour movement needs if we are to overcome the crisis.

Yes, I liked Tony Lane's article. I'm one of those people who find difficulty in putting pen to paper. In fact this contribution has cost me 30 cigarettes. But I feel that Tony was courageous to go to print on very sensitive issues that we know exist, and in so doing giving the people the opportunity to express their views about issues that worry them.

The Unions: caught on the ebb tide

Andrew Clark

As an ex miner with experience in the Scottish and Yorkshire coalfields for more than 20 years, and the past 13 years working with the trade union and labour movement in Scotland I must protest. Tony Lane's article (*Marxism Today* September issue) really does not warrant a detailed reply. *Marxism Today* should be ashamed of itself for allowing its pages to be stained with the regurgitations of so many old and hoary stories about the trade unions and trade unionists.

The opening section, the anecdote and poem seemed to be quite a revelation to Tony Lane, yet these stories and poems in their various forms were going the rounds in the movement 30 years ago that I know of, and probably long before then in all their various forms, depending on which industry one worked in. Even variations from plant to plant. How then can this comrade proceed to build a thesis attacking the trade unions in the way that he does? Managers and personnel directors throughout the years have been aware of the wider significance of jokes and rhymes; Tony Lane's apparent belief that they *now* appreciate this only reveals his lack of knowledge of the movement.

I should remind him that the trade union movement did not originate 20 years ago and what he now describes as new phenomena have been around for a long time; he could be more helpful if he looked at this period a bit more closely.

Insulting is the most polite way I can find of describing his claim that 'trade unionists have been obliged to undergo a crash course in economics' followed by 'schooled in the boom years when aggression was typically productive they had little need to concern

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themselves with "market shares" "import penetration" "unit costs" etc.' What does he think trade unionists were doing in all the years before the 60s—70s. Does he ever ask if it was as easy as he seems to think it was? Why are we so far behind in wages and conditions in so many fields?

Does he not realise that trade unionists in his so called 'boom years' were having to delve deep into industrial and political theory, so they could better fight and win any given struggle and draw the proper lessons in order to win workers for further and wider struggles, just as many trade unionists are doing now, to cement the unity necessary to take the movement forward.

However, it may be that Tony does not know anything of this — since his article assumes that the only trade unionists he knows are 'on the make' in one way or another or cowering in their rural homes, waiting for a city trade unionist to rescue them. Or a 'middle class commuter' to raise their radical traditions? The basic aim of the article seems to be to search for as many negative features of the trade union movement as possible, and attempt to show them to be the norm, and dress them up as theory, to prove the movement is incapable of facing up to todays problems! Much like the Tory press portrays the TUC as an old cart horse — endearing in its day but now a relic of a past age wandering around, not knowing where it's going.

He makes great play with accusations of 'sectionalism' etc, but does not seem to understand that there have been and will be again, occasions when sections have to take the lead and in doing so inspire and encourage others. I once heard a group of engineers from factories all over Britain, discussing very seriously who was going to 'bell the cat'. For Tony's benefit this was a serious discussion among sections as to which section tactically was best placed to the the lead.

Recent struggles

Has he ever heard, fairly recently, of the UCS? Or the miners in the 70s and the repercussions of these struggles on the subsequent developments in the fight for jobs, wages and conditions? Or has he noted the way in which wide sections of the movement rallied to their support because they realised the importance of their future struggles with the ones taking place then. The present wave of solidarity actions by wide 'sections' of the movement makes nonsense of his inferences of sectional greed and statements that the 'unions have failed to make up their minds about where they are going'. The extent to which we are able to win the political battles in the unions will largely determine the answer to these questions, but our approach will have to be made more positive, constructive and less defeatist than Tony Lane's.

Without any evidence he throws around phrases which differentiate between 'city' trade unionists and 'rural' trade unionists and makes the incredible suggestion that rural trade unionists are only capable of following their big brothers in the city and latching on to the big city events. Well, it all depends on what he means by smaller towns. But in the recent past in the central belt of Scotland alone, I can recall demonstrations on various issues in Ayr, Kilmarnock and Kilbirnie in Ayrshire, in Hamilton, Motherwell and Cambuslang in Lanarkshire, Bathgate, Linlithgow in West Lothian, in Falkirk and Stirling in Stirlingshire, not to mention, at the height of last winter, an outstanding event in Lochgelly in Fife. All this, plus attending other demonstrations and events in the four main cities in Scotland. This isn't bad for people depicted as cowering in their homes 'furtive and underground', 'allowing middle class commuters' to carry on their 'non conforming political traditions'. This is insulting nonsense.

As a trade unionist for over 30 years, living and working in rural areas, throughout my life I take strong exception to this slur on the record of many fine men and women who have fought hard and continue to do so for trade union, socialist and communist ideas in rural areas, despite all the problems and with some success. In any case, in our circumstances, where does a rural area begin, or an urban, suburban area, standing town area end? Who was it said 'where does an economic question begin and a political question end and vice versa'?

Is Greenock (Lee Jeans) standing town or urban, is Bathgate (Plesseys) urban or rural, is Ayr (Wallacetown Engineering) rural or standing town, is Kilbirnie rural or whatever, and so one could go on, does it matter? My contention is that wherever workers are in struggle, as they have been in these and other places recently, we have to win maximum support without becoming involved in spurious arguments. How lovely is all this divisive material for the bosses. Those of us involved in rural areas know only too well how the bosses will use all sorts of attempts to divide workers in struggle. It's many years ago since I heard managers say that the 'locals' really didn't want to be involved, it was the 'incomers' who were leading them astray, we joked about it, but realised all the time how insidious it was and fought for unity.

This slant of Tony Lane's therefore, is no new thing to us but comes in the same category as the catholic/protestant or black/white divide and many more, which is part of the bosses armoury. We don't need a *Marxism Today* article to tell us about these things, we live with them!

Winning Clarity

I wonder if Tony Lane has ever lived or worked in 'the country'; he may have heard to Tolpuddle and some events which took place there, then again his lack of evidence to substantiate his wild assertions suggests he may not. To save him the trouble of going back any further than the past 20 years, which seems to be the area where his 'expertise' lies, I would suggest that he gets in touch with the Agricultural Workers Union, or the miners who also have a fair knowledge of 'rural' trade unionism, or the public services unions with members in these areas. They will be able to describe to him in some detail the extent of local based activity organised and led by local (long term) and newly established residents, despite attempts by Tony or Tory to divide us.

In the fight to win clarity on all the complex issues before us today, there will be no straight, all embracing, simple way, it will always be necessary to organise strategy and distinguish the best tactical position at any given time. To describe shop stewards who have to deal with this problem daily as indulging in a philosophy of 'he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day' and then to depict them only as revenge seekers longing for the day when the economic climate will change and they can get them kicking boots on again, is an insult to the thousands of trade unionists throughout the country who give of their effort, energy and spare time, many of them for *no reward*, not just to fight for wages and conditions today but to change society and who take a much less cynical view of life than Tony Lane. Their motive is not revenge — it is socialism.

This article does not tell us much about the trade union movement that anyone close to it did not already know. What it does tell us more than anything else is that Tony has a talent for looking for the negative and for vilification dressed up in verbosity and then called theoretical discussion. I'm certain the bosses will be grateful for his assistance.

Marxism Today should let them do their own dirty work and it should get on with the job of discussing that which is really new and fresh: the real problems which divide our movement, negative and positive in a constructive way which will help us all to do our job better, of facing up to the challenge ahead and forging the Unity necessary to face it. □

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Channel Five

WOMEN COMMAND THE FLAGSHIP

Lesley Hilton

Channel Four's weekly half-hour current affairs programme will address the same audience as *Panorama* and *World in Action*, but will differ in at least two ways. Its peak-time slot will certainly not be on Mondays, when those two programmes currently compete. Secondly, while men will not be excluded from working on the programmes, women will make all the editorial decisions. They will not be tackling purely women's subjects, nor addressing a female audience. The idea, according to Liz Forgan, (Senior Commissioning Editor for Actuality) 'has nothing to do with positive discrimination or social justice. It is a journalistic experiment. Given that roughly half the world is female and given that the vast majority of the editorial decisions in newspapers, radio and television are taken by men, there seems to us a glimmer of a chance, that we the media, may not always be getting the story right.'

The idea for this programme originally came from the Womens Broadcasting and Film Lobby (WBFL) which was set up in 1979 to improve the employment and training opportunities for women in the film and television industry and to challenge sexist advertising and stereotyped images of women appearing in the media. In November 1979 members of WBFL had a meeting with the IBA at which they explained their concern over the position of women within the television industry:

> '. . .we repeated that women are 51% of the population and generally the majority of the viewing audience, even for current affairs. Yet most programmes are made by men, from a male viewpoint, with a male viewer in mind, which limits the subjects covered and leads to the portrayal of women in stereotyped ways. There is a tendency to divide subjects into 'general' issues and 'women's' issues — there don't seem to be 'men's' issues. If a current affairs programme covers a 'women's' issue, it is considered to have 'done' women — you won't get a programme about childminders within three months, or maybe much longer, or one on abortion, despite the fact that they are obviously very different issues. A subject seen as a 'women's' issue is lucky to get an airing at all in prime time — it is quite likely to be dismissed as more suitable for afternoon programmes. The IBA should actively encourage a different attitude on the fourth channel.'

Liz Forgan

There have been one or two changes of direction as far as Liz Forgan's plans for the programme go. Her original idea was that it would be a programme produced by women. It is now one where the major editorial decisions are to be taken by women. She maintains that there is no difference and says that she is not dictating anything for the series except that 'the governing intelligence — the eyes, choice and instinctive minds must be female'.

Initially it was planned to give as many groups as possible short runs of programmes but Liz Forgan says that she gradually realised that was impracticable 'because (a) it made the cost prohibitive and (b) it did not give anyone long enough to get their feet on the ground, make their mistakes and come right in the end'. She then decided to award all 40 programmes to one company but the Channel Four Board rejected that proposal on the grounds that it could lead to merely slot-filling. Ten groups submitted applications for the series and the final result has been a split between two companies, Gambles Milne Ltd and Broadside.

Gambles Milne Ltd (who are doing two thirds of the series) is headed by Lyn Gambles and Claudia Milne. Lyn started as a Reuters journalist and has been a researcher and director at Thames Television. She produced *The Risk Business* for the BBC. Claudia worked on *World in Action* and was a founder member of the ACTT Equality Committee. They will be executive producers. To quote from their proposal to Channel Four they say: 'As executive producers we intend to have full discussions with the production team. . .While this team has an unashamedly hierarchical structure, our experience of current affairs tells us that decisions have to be taken quickly. There is just not time for consultation'. They have said that they want to foster the use of more women technicians and that although they expect their production team to be composed mainly of women they do not have a separatist policy towards men.

Broadside intends to be a less hierarchical organisation and has twelve company directors, one of whom is Dianne Tammes who was the first woman in Britain to get an ACTT camera ticket. They have a clear commitment to using women technicians and also to trying to involve the crews in the editorial process by bringing them in to help set up the programmes rather than just hiring them in at the last minute (whether or not the unions will allow a more collective way of working remains to be seen). They intend to show how their stories are constructed and feel that it is important to stress to viewers that what appears as news and current affairs in the media are only other people's selective opinions of what is important.

Obviously as a woman working in television I wish this slot every success but I don't think that we should all rush to our television sets in November expecting to see anything startlingly different. All the women involved in this programme (with the exception of Liz Forgan who has no previous TV experience) have been around television for a while and the conventions of television take a long time to unlearn — and they will have to be unlearned before alternatives can present themselves. It will take a while before the production teams can come up with anything really new and it may take longer than the year that the contracts last. If that is the case it would be a shame if the programmes were to be judged too soon — they must be given time to develop. Many people will be wanting them to fail — or at least not to succeed. Women only need to make one mistake for everyone to say 'told you so'. It is very important that this slot is seen as a means to an end and not an end in itself. It should serve as a jumping off point for programmes and staffing policies throughout the television industry which would make the need for a 'women's' slot unnecessary.

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FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

Zareer Masani

Indian festivals do not travel well to the terraced and semi-detached confines of British inner-cities. Diwali, the Hindu Festival of lights, which British Asians will be celebrating on 30 November, will not be the explosion of light and colour that sweeps the Indian sub-continent. That it survives at all as a brief flicker in a British autumn is an affirmation of its primacy and universality for Asians of all religions.

In an Indian childhood, Diwali occupies much the same place as Christmas in the West. But there is an additional element of suspense because the date varies each year according to the ancient Hindu lunar calendar. In an Indian city, its approach is heralded by several weeks of sporadic firecrackers, building up to an explosive crescendo on Diwali eve. During Diwali, ancient and modern technology combine as public buildings, cinemas, shops and private homes blaze simultaneously with electric light-displays and oil-lamps, while the sky fills with exploding fireworks. In both cities and villages, fireworks are the great equaliser, as children and adults, Hindus and Muslims, businessmen and domestic servants, cluster around molten 'fountains', exchange sparklers and ignite deafening 'bombs'.

For a few weeks the spirit of misrule reigns unchecked — I can remember hiding unchided behind a garden hedge aiming explosive cotton pellets at the tyres of passing cars. Diwali mischief is not confined to children. Most families have Diwali parties, and after the children are asleep their elders stay up and gamble — even losing brings luck on Diwali — get drunk and compete in obscene jokes.

The occasion for this licensed suspension of the usual taboos dates back to the prehistoric legends of the *Ramayana*, the central Hindu religious epic. Diwali commemorates the coronation of Rama, an incarnation of the god Vishnu, after his return form a 14-year exile. According to the legend, an allegorical representation of the subjugation of India's Dravidian aboriginals by Aryan invaders, Rama, the Aryan hero, returns to his rightful inheritance after vanquishing the forces of evil represented by Ravana, the demon-king of Sri Lanka. The struggle between good and evil, associated in Aryan cosmology with light and darkness, is re-enacted during the ten-day festival of Dussehra, which culminates in the burning of huge effigies of Ravana. A fortnight later, Diwali celebrates Rama's triumphal return with the lighting of homes and the beginning of the Hindu New Year.

In subsequent ages, the pagan symbolism of the Aryan warrior-tribes has been overladen with that of the Hindu commercial and professional castes. Diwali is sacred to Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and consort of Vishnu. Prayers and offerings are made to the goddess, and traditional Hindu businessmen, whether in Bombay or Brent, open new books of accounts on Diwali day. Hence also the auspiciousness of gambling, otherwise frowned upon, and the worship of literacy, represented by the pen, as a means to wealth.

Despite its Hindu origins, Diwali has been secularised by its assimilation into other Indian cultures. Introduced to the Muslim courts of northern India by the Hindu wives of Mughal emperors, it continues to be shared as a common celebration by British Asians of both Indian and Pakistani origin. Asian communities here have adapted its rituals to local constraints. Street festivities have been replaced by Diwali performances at local community centres. The elaborate tracery of oil-lamps which lights the verandahs, roofs and terraces of Indian homes has had to be substituted by indoor candles. The weeks of riotous firework displays have to be confined to Guy Fawkes' day, so that white neighbours won't object. Nevertheless, Diwali survives, along with the Muslim Id, as one of the two most celebrated festivals in Britain's Asian community.

A TRAIN STOPPED IN MOSCOW

John Birch

While people in Moscow wait for the succession to the leadership to be resolved, and genuinely new policies to be implemented instead of the stop-gap food programme, a new film has been showing at the capital's largest and most prestigious cinema theatre, the Rossiya on Pushkin Square.

Advertised as a tale of 'irresponsibility', *A Train Stopped* marks the last appearance of actor Solonitsyn (familiar to Western filmgoers as Tarkovskii's *Andrei Rublev)* who died recently. Yet there is little doubt that a film held back for two years, touching such critical subjects as local party cover-ups, press distortion, endemic irresponsibility and with such an excellent cast is being shown as a political act of some importance. The Georgian film *Swimmer* (about repression in the 30s) was recently released in a strongly censored variant and at an out-of-the-way surburban 'palace of culture': *A Train Stopped* is being shown with few cuts and its pessimistic final sequences undoctored.

An investigator arrives in a provincial town to determine the reasons for a train derailment in which the engine-driver was heroically killed trying to prevent the crash; the local party already has plans underway for a memorial to commemorate this town hero. But the more he probes the further the responsibility and culpability for the accident stretches: from speedometers that never worked, and drunken linesman to the station manager, and back to the driver who simply tried to jump and save himself too late. The investigator is warned off, and when he persists his adopted stray dog is killed. Finally he leaves, defeated by the collusion of the local party and the press (the journalist played by Solonitsyn) who between them have built up the myth of the 'hero engine driver'. And, as the monument is unveiled, he walks away whilst music drowns out the speechifying for TV cameras by station master, workmates, former teachers and the film cuts from the ranks of blank-faced and uniformed Komsomol teenagers

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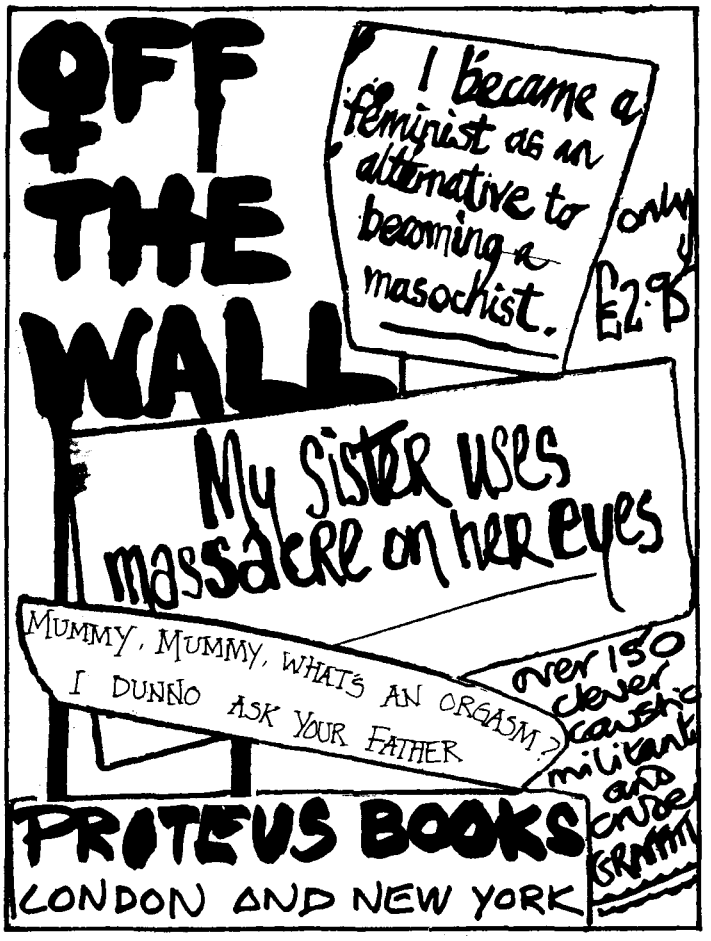
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to the lonely retreating figure of the investigator...

The story is hardly a novel one, and over the last few years many aspects have been treated with increasing frankness in *Pravda* and other Soviet papers. However, the director has produced a film of great artistic and moral power, a compelling if exhaustingly intense account that catches exactly the attitudes and turn of phrase of each representative character, and very accurately depicts what a provincial town actually looks like, from plush party offices to old-fashioned sanatoria and slightly run-down hotels.

Thus it takes social criticism well beyond the one-room, one-enterprise setting of the *Bonus* and without that film's rather contrived and hopeful ending. It also avoids any caricature or black and white characterisation: the investigator is a meddling fool, 'You haven't understood a thing, have you?' says the station master towards the end with weary condescension: 'The rules? The rules? We haven't kept to the rules since 1934!' cries the elderly linesman driven by cross-examination to exasperated self-explanation (and a fatal heart attack), 'and *if we had,* nothing would ever have worked!' In the major confrontation of the film the investigator accuses the journalist (with whom he has been friendly and shared the hotel room) of selling out by writing of the 'Driver's heroism' when he knows it's not true: 'Look: you're not going to do any good', retorts Solonitsyn, 'You're just upsetting everyone — at least the old woman will get a hero's pension for her son because of what I'm doing.'

What then are the ideas behind releasing the film now and, just as important, the audience reaction? The strict enforcement of 'the rules' to eliminate corruption and inefficiency is an ambiguous goal, since they are in themselves contradictory, and especially because the golden age harked back to by some (both young and old) is a vague era before the War ie, the 1930s. Others have concluded that rather than the bogus heroes and heroic deeds invoked from that period on, what is needed, now at least, is for everyone to do their job responsibly (at least in *Man of Marble* there was a hero in the first place.) Yet overall, there is no clear conclusion to be drawn, thus reflecting the pervasiveness and intractability of the problems involved, and its showing serves to open up more realistic discussion (of internal problems) as the increasing criticism in the Soviet press has also been doing.

The main problem in this struggle, even race, to create a wider thinking public between a mass who unthinkingly accept and those who have long ago given up reading or listening to the official media is sheer indifference. Compared to the long queues to see the popular Rossiya's usual fare of escapist Soviet and generally second-rate Western films, in August notably few were going to see *A Train Stopped:* the box-office draw of the cast was neutralised by the subject. Many who went walked out — though whether through boredom or being unable to take the quite undiluted and pessimistic realism of the film, one could not say.

An excellent and disturbing film marking a crucial point in the development of the Soviet Union, which will be well worth seeing when it reaches the West — although by then it may have been already out-dated by subsequent (even consequent) events.

From Stalker, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky and starring Anatoly Solonitsyn as the writer.

FRENCH BROADCASTING

Suszi Benghiat

Long experience of both French and British broadcasting has convinced me that the difference between them is not as pronounced as it might first appear. In both countries broadcasting is considered far too important to be left to the broadcasters. Even though each establishment exercises control in its own way, according to national expectations, history and tradition, the end result is quite similar. Yet, the prevailing image of French broadcasting has been one of tight government controls. It is true that news programmes were interfered with, but significantly, those involved fought against constraints and their fight was often conducted in public.

The French have always had a great regard for the 'independence' of the BBC, until they look at it more closely and see the way any really controversial issue is handled. I've often heard French colleagues exclaim on such occasions: 'But I thought the BBC was free'. To a French broadcaster, freedom means freedom of expression — they do not believe in the myth of *absolute* neutrality. TV film directors, for instance, have much more creative freedom: they can choose the kind of programme they do and can switch from current affairs, to drama, to light entertainment, as they like. They are not tied to one department or channel. Moreover, they are considered the authors of their work and receive their share of the

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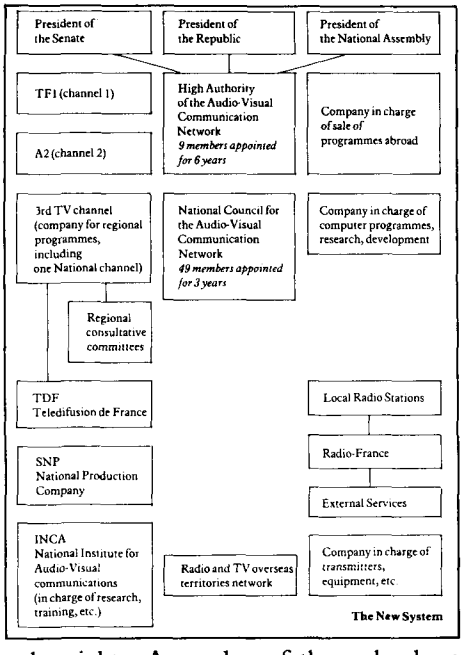
Channel Five


President of the Senate
President of the Republic
President of the National Assembly
TF1 (channel 1)
A2 (channel 2)
High Authority of the Audio-Visual Communication Network
9 members appointed for 6 years
Company in charge of sale of programmes abroad
3rd TV channel (company for regional programmes, including one National channel)
National Council for the Audio-Visual Communication Network
49 members appointed for 3 years
Company in charge of computer programmes, research, development
Regional consultative committees
TDF Teledifusion de France
Local Radio Stations
Radio-France
SNP National Production Company
External Services
INCA National Institute for Audio-Visual communications (in charge of research, training, etc.)
Radio and TV overseas territories network
Company in charge of transmitters, equipment, etc.
The New System

sales rights. A number of them also have worked, or work for, private companies which provide programmes, or programme facilities, for the public corporations.

Over the ten years that I worked for French radio and television in London, we were often asked for reports on the BBC Charter and the types of contracts journalists, directors and producers had. These requests came both from management and from the union. But, in view of their existing structures, it is not surprising that management was much more interested in what they found than the unions. In 1968, one of the first things the striking broadcasting staff did when they met to discuss the future of the industry, was to obtain a copy of the BBC Charter. It did not take them long to reject it as a model.

It is necessary to explain briefly the structure the Mitterrand government inherited before looking at the proposed reform of the broadcasting system. Until 1973 the structure was similar to that of the BBC (one radio and two television channels — with some limited advertising). However, the question of a private television network is still very controversial in France. When Giscard d'Estaing was planning his reform in 1973 it was strongly rumoured that the structure he intended to set up would include a private sector — all sections of the staff were poised to go on strike had the announcement been made. At the last minute the idea was dropped due to opposition from the President's own allies: the Gaullist tradition of public service broadcasting was still very strong indeed. Instead, Giscard created several companies — one for radio, one each for the three television channels, one for archive and research and the Société Francaise de Production, which retained massive studios, the heavy equipment and a large administrative and production staff. This was to act as a service to the other companies, but it was also to compete on the open market with private production firms. With its heavy superstructure it seemed doomed to fail from the beginning.

One year after coming to power the Mitterrand administration, like its predecessors, is tackling the thorny problem of radio and television and its relationship to the government. Reform, leading to an independent system of broadcasting (which, in France, does not mean commercial), was one of the most important promises of the 'Politics of Change' manifesto. And although the parliamentary debate only began this June, over the past twelve months the issue has given rise to wide-ranging discussion throughout the media.

Since Mitterrand's election, those appointed to key posts in broadcasting have faced criticism from their predecessors, from a vociferous opposition press and from large sections of the public. Results of a poll conducted by the popular right-wing newspaper *France-Soir* revealed great dissatisfaction with the programmes — a large number of which had, in fact, been produced under the previous administration. Some programmes were judged too 'educational' and tedious and Channel 1 had even dared cancel the Miss World programme. One of the most immediate and visible changes in television coverage can be seen in the presentation of the news, current affairs and discussion programmes. Here, attempts to open up the media have, in some cases, been made rather hastily and with insufficient preparation with the result that some of the programmes set up to provoke controversy ended up in total chaos — and even in insults and blows.

In France, newsreaders are television personalities who present 'their' news in a highly personal style (it is as if Robin Day or Brian Walden presented the nine or ten o'clock news). When these 'stars' disappeared from the screen, or were relegated to less glamorous early or late evening news slots, some resigned, but those who remained used every opportunity to voice their outrage publicly. Staff seem generally quite demoralised at the length of this interim period — a period during which the media is being run by a caretaker management until the reform has been voted on in parliament and the new people appointed according to the new law intended to reform the whole system.

What then is the proposed reform? Is it true to election promises or is it only a case of *'plus ca change plus c'est la meme chose'*. After all, this is the sixth time that broadcasting reforms have been introduced during the Vth Republic.

Long before coming to power, a Socialist Party Commission had been working on proposals to democratise the broadcasting system by setting up a new structure free from state interference. It is on this basis, with certain modifications, that the government has worked out its own draft law. The most important innovation is the creation of a 'High Authority' which will act as 'the guarantor of the independence of public service radio and television.' Its structure reads like an amalgam of those of the BBC and the IBA. It will have nine members: three nominated by the president of the republic, three by the president of the senate and three by the president of the national assemblies. The Socialist Party Commission had proposed setting up an executive body of six and that these six should elect their own chairperson. However, with an uneven number, the new draft law states that the chairperson, who will have the casting vote, shall be appointed by the president of the republic. This controversial modification was apparently introduced at the last minute at Mitterrand's insistence.

Members of the High Authority will appoint the Director-Generals of each company and these remain roughly the same as those set up in 1974. The Authority 'will ensure the plurality and the balance of programmes'. It was also to have a say in the contents of programmes with regard to violence, sexuality and public order but this was withdrawn following union opposition. However, the Authority will arbitrate in conflicts that might arise between producers and management on issues of 'freedom of conscience and creativity'. Certain general principles are also laid down. These include the right of reply for everyone and the right of all citizens to a new audio-visual system of communications which would take into account the diversity of their cultures, their creeds, their thoughts and opinions.

All these changes sound very promising but the results will depend on the people working in both television and radio and, more importantly perhaps, on the prevailing political climate. Let us not forget that the Charter of the BBC of Carleton-Greene is still the same as the one we have today or that the 'golden age' of television in both Britain and France — the sixties — coincided with a period of prosperity, expansion and relative social stability.

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Reviews

ENGINEERS AT WAR 1939-1945
Richard Croucher
Merlin 1982 £4.80 pbk
ISBN 0 850 36 271 7

'On the one hand we are working under a capitalist system, more highly organised for exploitation, even than in peace time. Every advantage that the employers can secure from collaboration and relaxation will be, and is being, ruthlessly acquired throughout the industry. No sacrifices are being made by the employers. No fraction of managerial power is being surrendered. Instead of sacrifice, the employers have actually strengthened their position in relation to the sub-division of labour, while their profits are guaranteed. For the workers it is truly a war on two fronts, or, if you like, back and front.'

(From a sub-committee report to the Manchester AEU District Committee, 8 January 1942)

This quotation given in Richard Croucher's book highlights the dilemma of many trade unionists, socialists and communists in the early period of the Second World War and its theme is central to this important contribution to the history of working class struggle. Despite the gloom of the quotation major advances were made by trade unionists, often in spite of their leadership, and big business would do well to read this book if only for them to realise what might happen to their system if Thatcher continues her warlike stances.

The strong material interests which trade unionists had in winning the war againnst fascism did not blunt their class instincts and most remained highly critical of management activities and inefficiences throughout the war years. It *was* an engineers' war and the soldiers at the rear, the soldiers of production, played the major part in winning the war. The workers accepted a 'no strike' policy and compulsory arbitration (almost!) together with unrestricted overtime working and many other sacrifices, although it took until 1942 before the trade unions were able to gain a voice in production policy at the workplace — through joint production committees or the exteended role of shop stewards. Workers *were* concerned about delays in production and shortage of supplies. Frankly the managements were reluctant to concede anything to gain workers co-operation. Even in the middle of the war they had to be bludgeoned, they had

to be forced, and repeatedly in the Coventry area for example (where I was District Secretary of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions) it was necessary to bring in one or other of the ministries for special enquiries into the misuse of materials or labour due to inefficient management. The managers didn't like it; they hated the interference from outside which this represented and they resented the growing strength and influence of the trade unions.

In some respects Richard Croucher under-estimates this working class approach to winning the war but his book contains much useful material and has written it up in a remarkably readable fashion, bringing out from the dirt and grease of the workshop the considerable activities of rank and file trade unionists duiring the war and the rearmament period leading up to it. He traces the increasing confidence and independent outlook of engineering workers as fuller employment became the order of the day. To the amazement of the older AEU skilled men the apprentices became militant and demonstrated on more than one occasion how determined organisation and strikes can succeed. Women workers also moved out from their inferiority...(Croucher writes)

'Many of the women entrants of the Second World War had been exposed to the "rate for the job" argument and made it their own. In due course the Equal Pay Act and the attendant upturn in equal pay agitation would be the result. But there were wider implications. Even if only briefly, many women had experienced trade unionism in a highly political form. A vey high proportion of the new trade union members of the war were persuaded to pay the political levy; many experienced the primitive democracy of workplace meetings; others read and dicusssed factory newspapers. There can be little doubt that these and other encounters with factory politics lay behind the largest ever women's vote for the Labour Party in 1945.'

The importance of this statement should be measured against the fact that at the peak of the war effort one in three engineering workers were women.

The book provides plenty of evidence of working-class advance although Croucher tends to imply an unholy alliance of Bevin, the Communist Party and the trade union leaders to make the class struggle redundant. I was one of the most active trade unionists in the Coventry area (a major centre of war production) during the whole of the war years and I can truthfully say that in the many disputes which occurred the argument of 'the war effort' was never used to stop a strike or prevent workers pressing their grievances. It really wasn't necessary — people didn't need to be told of the dangers of a possible fascist invasion and in any event it was workers and their families that suffered from the concentrated bombing attacks on Coventry, Birmingham, Plymouth, East London, Liverpool and so on. (Incidentally my family and I were

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bombed-out in the process). We *all* wanted to see Hitler and the fascists defeated. But that did not mean that trade unionists allowed employers to ride roughshod over them. Anyone who lived in the middle of events, as I did, knows how much the employers' wings were clipped. Some tried to 'duck from under' but union strength and the shop steward system grew beyond anything known previously in the history of the trade union movement.

Workers increased their negotiating power against the background of wartime legislation, the importance of maintaining production and full employment. Management simply had to listen and the foremen lost their right to hire and fire and dispense personal favouritism. A significant feature of the war period was the growth in trade union membership and shop steward participation. One gets the impression that Croucher overlooks the degree to which the class war was waged in this direction although he does deal extensively with some of the major engineering strikes which took place.

The book draws heavily on the records of the AEU (especially some of its district committees) and the activities of rank and file movements, the Communist Party and other left groups, in the engineering industry. For some reason, however, information is very limited on the role of unions other than the AEU and little is said about the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions all of whom had quite a part to play during the period. Croucher therefore only presents part of the story of the Engineers' War and some of his conclusions are controversial to say the least. On the other hand there must be a welcome for such a substantial effort.

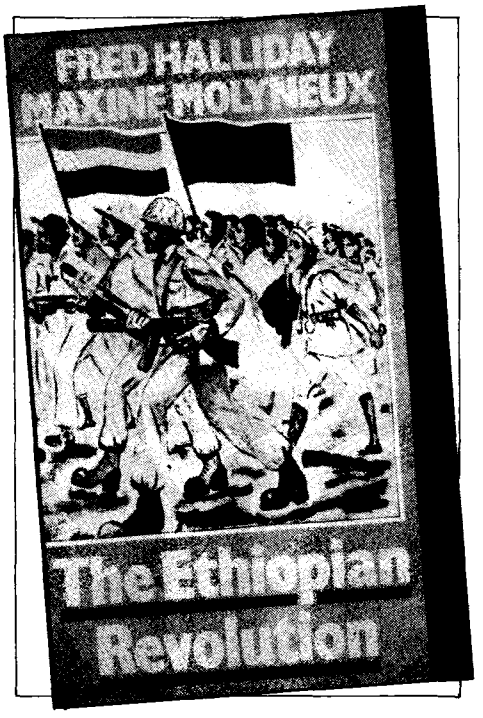
Jack Jones

THE ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION
Fred Halliday and Maxine Molyneux
Verso and New Left Books 1981. £5.95 pbk
ISBN 0 86091 741 X.

Events in the Horn of Africa since 1974 have confounded and divided the Left. What to make of a war between the new 'revolutionary' Ethiopian regime and a Somalia, whose efforts to build 'socialism' in the early 1970s won plaudits — especially with both of them backed by the Soviet Union at some stage? Or of the Ethiopian ruler, proclaimed a 'true revolutionary' by Fidel Castro himself, yet still locked into a continuing and gruelling war with an Eritrean liberation movement that proclaims its own commitment to 'Marxism-Leninism'? Or of the other conflicts that pit the centralised authority in Ethiopia against insurrectionary movements, some based in class, others on 'national' rights of self-determination, but both couched in familar Marxist language?

It is especially crucial to understand these events as they have had what the authors stress are crucial effects on 'the overall climate of world politics', with the Horn having been a key arena for the intensification of the cold war. At the outset, the authors make only modest claims about their own contribution to clarifying these issues:

> It is not intended to be a comprehensive study of contemporary Ethiopia... (but) rather, an analysis of the *main features* of the Ethiopian revolution... At the same time, we seek to relate the events of the Ethiopian revolution to certain more general theoretical and political questions that arise in the study of the Third World and of (its) revolutions...(p 11)



Their thematic and comparative approach does produce some insights. It *is* important to begin to 'explain' Iran, Nicaragua, and Ethiopia — all revolutions which depart from rural-based guerrilla struggles that had been the common pattern of the last fifty years. The authors' approach is to look for the nature of the 'structural crisis' of the old order, and in doing so they are able to give due weight to political as well as underlying economic causes. In the Ethiopian case, it is useful to see the revolution as at once both the last of those against an absolutist state and at the same time a 'modern' post-colonial revolution.

Halliday and Molyneux' approach does throw up some key questions for debate but it doesn't always settle them for perhaps inevitably their approach is a little thin on actual post-revolutionary events. The first third of the book sets up the comparative questions and provides some history of the *ancien regime*; another 100 pages deal with the crucial regional and national questions and the international dimension. So only 50 pages are left to deal with post-1974 events and explanations of them: scarcely enough to sustain one of their conclusions — that there has indeed been a social revolution — or to explore what kind, which would require some detailed spelling out of the actual effects of land reform or the working of state-owned industry. The lack of specific anlaysis of this sort matters all the more because in places the authors make less than modest claims.

They are not completely unfair in dismissing other works by saying that 'most of those on the Left who adopted positions on the Horn of Africa did so by means of simplifications of greater or lesser scale. . .(and in part through) preconceived ideas, pro and con, about the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. . .' By and large they do avoid 'reducing the complexities of the Horn to simpler shades'. (One small but crucial, and perhaps symptomatic, error is where, early on, they refer to Eritrea's '*reincorporation* into Ethiopia in 1952' whereas their own resumé of the history makes clear that Eritrea was never an integral part of Ethiopia before that date.) However, the very judicious, cautious nature of their generalisations, the carefully balanced nature of their conclusions, does not itself always clarify (which is *not* the same as over-simplify). Often 'balance' is achieved by asserting some generalisation, and then before one lot of over-simplifying partisans can applaud, they simply assert an alternative and sometimes contradictory conclusion. This 'on the one hand. . .but on the other' approach can sometimes be dialectical and insightful but sometimes just seems like careful hedging of bets.

If we are told that the military cabal all along 'sought to establish alliances within civilian forces' how does this square with the sensible-sounding assertion that 'military regimes. . .tend to resist measures that would lessen their monopoly of power'? Is it dialectical or wanting it both ways, to argue that 'it was not the military alone that overthrew the *ancien regime* . . . (and that it) consolidated the achievements of the mass movements' but also that it is 'mistaken to assume. . . that it (the social revolution) has occurred in spite of the military regime'?

In the end, though, it is some of the conclusions that this volume does assert, rather than its ambiguities and cautious assess-

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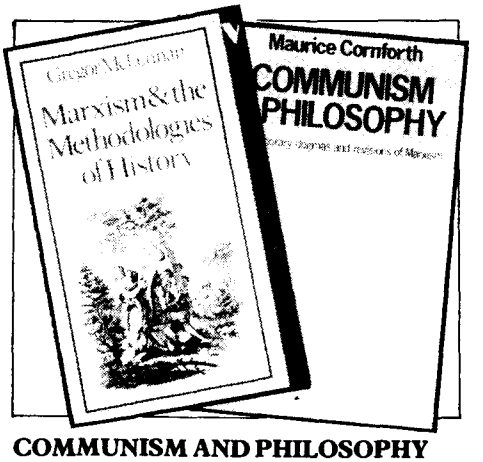
ments that most trouble this reviewer. For at a more subliminal level, and however qualified their argument the two authors *do* take a position in relation to the issues and contestants. Their book does not give unqualified support to the military regime in Ethiopia but still comes near to saying the 'best' that can be said of it, and for accepting its historical necessity. This position is embodied in a few basic and related propositions, all of which are challengeable and all of which are only barely substantiated. They argue there has in fact been a social revolution in Ethiopia — the least difficult point to accept; but they then tend to equate that 'revolution' with the stated policies of the Derg, and explicitly they argue that the military was the *only* agency that could have taken charge of the revolutionary process. Finally, although they avoid suggesting that socialism is the only or necessary outcome and certainly are somewhat sceptical of the Soviet model of the non-capitalist road or the 'socialist-oriented' regime, they still assert that the military rulers' 'commitment to some form of radical change and their determination to implement what they proclaim are not, by now, in doubt.' Such a proposition *is* very much in doubt and needs proving. And having thus given the benefit of the doubt to the Derg, they offhandedly pooh-pooh the claims of the Eritrean movement as to its own social revolutionary character, especially those of the EPLF, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front. This they do by stating that the extent to which its programmes correspond to reality, and differ from those of other groups are 'open to question'.

Underlying their perspective is a basic premise that no realistic historical alternative to the actual turn of events was ever on. They reject any notion of the 'revolution betrayed' as idealistic and utopian. But this position sits uneasily with their professed intention to use an approach which restores 'purposive action to its appropriate place'. It is precisely because of a belief in that approach that others do not accept it is 'voluntaristic' to search for a path forward in the Ethiopian revolution that does not see, as the only historical necessity, what our two authors admit is a repressive, military regime, unwilling to contemplate the right of national self-determination for the Eritreans.

Lionel Cliffe



COMMUNISM AND PHILOSOPHY
Contemporary dogmas and revisions of Marxism
Maurice Cornforth
Lawrence and Wishart 1980. pbk £4.50
ISBN 85315 547 X

MARXISM AND THE METHODOLOGIES OF HISTORY
Gregor McLennan
Verso editions 1981. pbk £4.95
ISBN 0 86091 743 6

Communism and Philosophy was the last book Maurice Cornforth wrote before his death at the end of 1980. Sadly, the work was intended to be the *first* of a whole series of volumes covering a wide range of philosophical topics, from 'thinking and being' to logic and dialectics, nature and society to values and value-judgements. The task of this ambitious project was to develop what Cornforth calls 'a consistent philosophical position' on the basis of 'the scientific achievements of Marx's fundamental formulations of historical materialism'. Cornforth clearly felt that an enormous amount of fresh work had to be done since he had then reached the view that much of traditional Marxist philosophy — including the positions he expounded in his popular introductions to *Dialectical Materialism* — stood in need of substantial revision.

What is the problem? *Communism and Philosophy* argues that while the fundamentals of Marxist theory are valid and like Copernicus and Darwin, Marx still 'awaits the refutation of his fundamental ideas', many of the formulations and propositions supposedly derived from these fundamentals are quite wrong. They get in the way of Marxism as a scientifically based theory and have led Marxists to think of classes, nations, the party, ideology and philosophy itself in dogmatic and illusory terms: as entities, agencies or structures which somehow exist outside of or in abstraction from the real social activity of concrete individuals. Althusser's view of ideology as an 'apparatus' is one example; another such 'ideological illusion' is the idea that the victory of socialism is 'inevitable', while the most fundamental illusion of all is the theory of dialectical materialism itself. The idea that there are dialectical laws which 'govern' the universe and are 'inherent in all being' is not only, Cornforth contends, a speculative dogma, it is a mischievous one. It encourages communists to believe that their political strategy is somehow guaranteed by the 'nature of the universe' and the 'laws of history' — to ignore in other words, empirical reality. Metaphysical speculations 'in the style of traditional philosophy' mar even the work of Marx himself and these residues of Hegelianism must be expunged if Marxist philosophy is to become 'wholly and purely' an 'exercise in genuine empirical theory' —a 'genuine empiricism'.

The argument gives rise to a number of puzzles. The first is the combination of a

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considerable scepticism towards many traditional Marxist positions with a rock-like certainty over the 'underlying' fundamentals. Since so much of 'orthodox Marxism' is apparently illusory, it seems strange that no argumentation is presented in *defence* of these fundamentals. Why should dialectical materialism be metaphysical, when historical materialism is not? This hints at a second problem. Cornforth's 'genuine empiricism' seems to rest upon propositions which are quite as univeral as the ones he denounces as dogmatic. Socialism, for example, is described as 'a necessity, in the practical sense, for the epoch of the scientific and technological revolution': yet doesn't this imply some sense of inevitability? Cornforth contends that we can only understand the 'nature of the universe' by 'getting to know about human life and our relations with one another'. Yet wouldn't dialectical materialists agree?

Cornforth seems to be saying that *because* the propositions of dialectical materialism are universal in character, they are inherently metaphysical and dogmatic. It is true that dialetical materialists may *behave* dogmatically and *substitute* theory for facts, but that is a vice to which all philosophy is prone. Dialectical materialists follow Marx's point that theories must be empirically *derived* and concepts are only *presented* abstractly and logically in order to capture the essential properties of the phenomena concerned. To argue that because dialectical materialism is presented in terms of concepts which move from the 'abstract to the concrete' — from universal principles to particular phenomena in nature and society — it must therefore be a 'speculative metaphysic' is like saying that Marx 'deduced' the categories of *Capital* from the 'first principles' of the commodity! There is a basic confusion here between the way we present a theory and the way in which that theory is derived. How to prevent universal philosophical categories from becoming 'an injurious dogma' is a real problem but throwing the baby out with the bathwater is no solution. As *Communism and Philosophy* itself demonstrates, 'theories of the universe', however much we seek to expel them from our midst, have a habit of continuing to hang around.

This is a question which is central to Gregor McLennan's *Marxism and the Methodologies of History* for McLennan is concerned to explore at some length the relationship between philosophical assumptions and historical writing. He makes the point that Cornforth really misses: 'Marxists are never simply empiricists' because they acknowledge *both* the 'theoretical moment in science' and the importance of empirical evidence. In McLennan's view there is a necessary friction between general theory and specific analysis and while some Marxists like EP Thompson and GA Cohen have tended to underestimate the importance of philosophy, others like John Foster and Albert Soboul have, McLennan argues, imposed theoretical categories too rigidly upon historical evidence. This problem is evident in aspects of Marx's writing as well: the use of 'logic' as a trans-historical pattern so that concrete history becomes the 'factual fodder for positivistic abstract law'. 'A mixture of Hegel and positivism'.

Gregor McLennan has written a formidably comprehensive book. Amongst its wide-ranging assessments of contemporary and classical historical writing, Marxist as well as non-Marxist, the comment on 'social history', prominent in the History Workshop Movement, is particularly interesting; so is the pithy analysis of EH Carr's *What is History*? Yet, as a critique of classicical Marxist philosophy, *Marxism and the Methodologies of History* is less convincing. The author's preference for philosophical realism over dialectical materialism is tantalisingly undeveloped and the argument that the lattr can at best be 'true but trivial' is not sustained. Realism, McLennan says, can play its philosophical role as 'generalisations from science and its concepts'. It can accept tendential laws of history and a sense of economic determination imposing limits on the form and outcome of struggles. On the other hand dialectical and (classically conceived) historical materialism must of necessity imprison evidence through categories imposed 'from above', through *a priori* assertions of a dogmatic kind. Why this should be so is never really made clear.

John Hoffman

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LETTERS

KEY QUESTIONS

The hoo-hah precipitated by the Tony Lane article (September issue) raises a number of very fundamental questions for the Communist Party. It goes right to the root also, of many of the key questions confronting the British labour movement, many of which found their expression at the Labour Party conference:

1 The relations between the industrial and political wings of the movement.

2 The political orientation of the trade union rank and file and their relation to the elected trade union leadership.

3 The need for a reappraisal of the shop steward movement

4 How the Left may be enabled to break out of its political straitjacket by developing an alliance, on the most flexible bases, of all progressive forces, capable of influencing and changing the dominant political trend of the time.

5 How to move towards the creation of a popular, democratic daily newspaper of the Left, capable of reflecting the aims and spirit of such a movement.

6 The need for a revolutionary party and the basis upon which that party formulates policy, develops its style and methods of work, and operates to influence the thinking of the movement.

Bill Ward, Manchester

IRISH ELECTIONS

Mike Morrissey's article in the October *Marxism Today* has left me more confused about Irish politics than ever. The only political sense I can make of it is that the DUP are the only people effectively articulating an anti-monetarist anti-Thatcher strategy in N Ireland. I find this very odd.

Similarly, I don't understand why, if the CPI is in favour of the ending of repression and the withdrawal of the British presence in N Ireland, Mike Morrissey says that 'a major economic initiative is required by the *British* Government'. This smacks of Unionism — has the Irish government no part to play in the economic recovery of the Six Counties?

Mike Morrissey also argues that the Assembly will be 'at least an arena in which demands can be raised about pressing political and economic questions'. But who is going to do it? Not the SDLP, or Provisional Sinn Fein, who are not going to take their seats. Not the CPI who are (be realistic) unlikely to get elected. Perhaps Mike Morrissey is thinking of the DUP again?

The only straightforward statement in the article is that 'Anti-unionism is becoming synonymous with nationalism' — which is as much as we knew already.

Joan Joney, Portsmouth

THE FAMILY

Three cheers for Gordon Wardman's work and for his emphasis on concrete problems facing the working class family (letters, October issue).

There will be three more cheers when evidence shows more social workers are advising those in matrimonial strife, and/or in conflict with their children, to cast aside the model of the family presented by reactionary ideologists.

All workers (the broad definition, not the Andy Capp/Florrie caricature) need to rid their families of father domination, of sexual division of household chores, of the particularly crippling belief that care of children is exclusively a function of females, of priority given to the interests of males at the expense of females — the list is long.

I hope Gordon is in agreement with me and that I do him no injustice by exposing the other side of the coin, but we must improve that which we wish to defend.

It is true it is easier to give this advice than to be guided by it when almost all other signposts point in the opposite direction, but all of us have to start somewhere.

Our families will gain by it, particularly those human beings in them who are doubly exploited.

Peter Pink, Hayes

RETHINK

Eric Hobsbawn's analysis of the position of the Left (October issue) will have set the cat amongst a number of militant pigeons, which has been needed now for some time.

As an ageing left-winger (since my pre-war teens) I have been appalled by the staleness of sloganising that passes for thinking amongst so many of the younger members of the Labour Party.

On one central issue, it has been clear for some time that Britain has to stay in Europe if we wish to achieve a policy of non-nuclear defence. To opt out (which may well suit Margaret Thatcher in her coming election policy) and to leave the nuclear club at the same time would reduce Britain (and I mean you and me) to the level of a punchbag in the international financial and diplomatic arena.

His points about 'fringe' movements has been more than established if those who participate in them are honest. My own personal experience over a number of years of substantial activity in special interest lobbies and organisations was that these special interest groups sapped the strength of the mainstream labour movement both in energies applied and because they allowed the labour movement to ignore the problem of updating its policies in detail over a whole new range of social issues, especially in areas which affected the quality of life as against the involvement of the industrial working class in the 'enjoyment' of the then burgeoning consumer society.

It is to be hoped that the Professor's paper will be a basis for extensive rethinking by the labour movement and discourage adherence to the stale slogans of my own youth: except for one — that of the Popular Front.

Frank Brown, London

THIRD WORLD ARMS

Damian Hardac (MT August) is concerned about 'the recent deal in nuclear technology between Argentine and Russia.'

His concern is justified but a little late and somewhat mis-directed. Had he watched BBC-2 'Newsnight Special' in April (or read *The Listener* of April 22) he would have known that the basis of Argentina's nuclear capacity goes back at least ten years, and not to the Soviet Union but to West Germany and a group of ex-Nazi atom scientists. Or perhaps he could have read, more recently, a *Guardian* news item reporting the Reagan administration's approval of the export of a computerised control system, being supplied by Foxboro to a heavy water plant, currently being built for the Argentine AEA by Sulzer Brothers, of peace loving Switzerland.

Hardac mentions the Indian bomb. Canadian technology made that one possible. And Pakistan? Israel? Iraq? Iran? South Korea? South Africa? Brazil?

Of course we should be dismayed by the growth of weapon-building technology in the Third World. But let's not forget that the process takes place by transfer of know-how and capital from 'developed' to 'underdeveloped', and that in this process the clear leaders, way out in front of the Soviet Union, are the states and corporations of the Western economies, in search of profits and political influence. And that's *our* problem. Keep your eye on the ball Hardac.

Ted Slade, New Malden

We welcome your letters for the December issue. They should be no longer than 200 words and arrive at the office not later than Friday 5 November.

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NOTES

FALKLANDS — SPECIAL BRIEF

Mike Gatehouse writes: The latest in an increasingly impressive 'Special Brief' series from the Latin America Bureau is a book entitled *Falklands/Malvinas — Whose Crisis?* Virtually the length of a Penguin special, this is no pot boiler. The Brief's purpose is to analyse the underlying assumptions behind Britain's military action and to challenge the pro-war consensus. It focuses specifically on the islands' internal economy, on the conflicting British and Argentine claims to sovereignty, on the historical relationship between the two countries, and on the military dictatorship in Argentina since 1976. There is also a short appendix which looks at the role of the popular press in Britain in forming public opinion during the crisis.

A very good buy at £1.95 from LAB, 1 Amwell St, London EC1R 1UL.

HAZARDS AT WORK

Alan Dalton writes: Recent TV, radio and press publicity on asbestos, lead, cotton dust, noise, cancer, hazards at work etc, all show failure by management and government to provide a healthy and safe workplace. The Labour Research Department has recently produced a series of four posters aimed at informing people of their health and safety rights, and management's responsibilities at work. All commonly available health and safety posters adopt a 'blame the workers' approach that assumes the worker is stupid or urge her or him to wear uncomfortable protective equipment. The LRD posters put the emphasis on management responsibility (as the law does). The posters will brighten up your workplace, and help improve working conditions. They are available in sets of four (noise, accidents, dangerous substances and safety policies) at a price of £1.50 (inc p&p) from *Labour Research,* 78 Blackfriars Road London SE1 8HF.

COMEDIA

Dave Morley writes: One of the groups which has been involved in the campaign for effective distribution for radical publishers is Comedia Publishing (formerly the Minority Press Group). Comedia has published nine titles in a series of books on the communications industry, ranging from an *Alternative Report* on the new Fourth Channel to a book on the development of working class writing.

Comedia is organising a conference, *Cablepower,* (on new media technology) in December at the ICA. More information from Comedia, 9 Poland Street, London W1 tel 01 437 8954.

PEOPLE'S MARCH PHOTOGRAPHS

Jovan Djordjevic writes: In May last year I took part in the People's March for Jobs, both as a marcher, and as the official photographer. I was sponsored by 5 trade unions and the West Midlands Arts, to produce a photographic document of the event. The project is now finished, and the photographs are available for exhibition. There are 120 photographs, laminated, and measuring 16" x 20". The exhibition is available for booking from CRIS Community Arts, Coventry Resource and Information Service, Cox Street, Coventry CV1 5LW.

SPARK EXHIBITION

Corinne Gray writes: Hard Rock has been postponed, but Hard Luck (CND's anti civil defence campaign) continues. One useful campaign tool is the Spark Exhibition.

The Spark Exhibition consists of 6 A1 panels (approx 2ft×3ft) each full colour printed on 300 gsm card — strong enough for public display both in and out of doors.

The pack of six panels is easily portable and the panels themselves are consecutively titled with separate heading boards — *Civil defence, who needs it, In the event of a nuclear attack, The realities of nuclear war . . .*

Simple graphics, many taken from Government Civil Defence publications, are strikingly transposed. The display has the right measure of hard information and confronting fact to communicate with those still left out of the debate — most of us belong to Category 3. And this can be done for less than half the cost of showing the *War Game!*

The pack will cost £15.00 and is available from most regional anti-nuclear bookshops or direct from SPARK at 74 Cathles Road, London SW12 9LG 01-673 7901.

RED LETTERS

Imogen Forster writes: Red Letters no 13, which appeared earlier this summer, is a 'theatre special', with articles on the political aspects of sex and censorship, the work of Hanns Eisler, and historical moments in people's theatre in Britain. A study by Anthony Hozier of the implications for actors and audiences of some theoretical questions in the work of Brecht will be continued in *Red Letters* 14, due out in October. The main focus of the issue will be 'popular culture', and there will be articles on the production and consumption of romantic fiction, on science fiction and its readership, and on costume melodramas of the 1940s.

Red Letters is available from Central Books, 14 The Leathermarket, London SE1 3ER (Subcription £4.50 for three issues) and from bookshops.

PALESTINIAN CO-OPERATIVES

Jim Layzell writes: Following the Israeli invasion of the Lebanon, many Palestinian Co-operatives were destroyed. These co-ops were organised by the Palestinian trade union movement to bring benefits to Palestinian refugees by reducing prices, increasing choice, and paying dividends to members. The Palestinian trade unions want to rebuild the co-ops and the London Co-op Political Committee is organising an appeal to help them. Information, collecting forms from, and donations to CRS Political Committee, London Region, 54 Maryland Street, London E15 1JE.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

John Grahl is a member of the Communist Party Economic Committee.
Maxine Molyneux is co-author of *The Ethiopian Revolution.*
Avila Kilmurray is a member of the Northern Ireland Poverty Lobby.
Rodney Bickerstaffe is general secretary of the National Union of Public Employees.
Bob Friar led the research team into the reorganisation of NUPE in the mid '70s.
Anthony Barnett is the author of *Iron Britannia* (Alison and Busby, forthcoming).
Stuart Hall is Professor of Sociology at the Open University.
Robert Gray teaches at Portsmouth Polytechnic and is a member of the Communist Party Theory and Ideology Committee.
John Fairley is a research fellow examining training issues at Aston University.
Dave Priscott is a member of the *Marxism Today* editorial board.
Pete Carter is Midlands Regional Organiser of UCATT.
Andrew Clarke is *Morning Star* circulation organiser in Scotland.
Lesley Hilton is a freelance film camera woman and has contributed to *What This Channel Four* (Comedia).
Zareer Masani is a freelance writer.
John Birch is a postgraduate student.
Suszi Benghiat has worked in French and British broadcasting.
Jack Jones was formerly general secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union and is now active in the pensioners' movement.
Lionel Cliffe has worked in Africa and is an editor of the *Review of African Political Economy.*
John Hoffman lectures at Leicester University and is a member of the *Marxism Today* editorial board.

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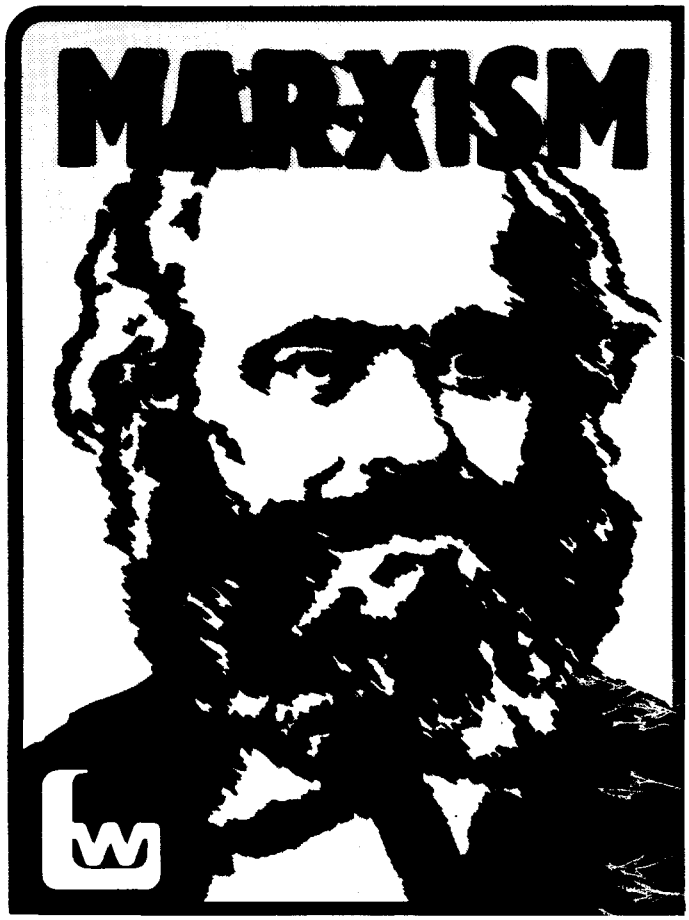

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